

THE LURE OF EXCITEMENT COMPLETE IN
THIS ISSUE

THE ARGOSY

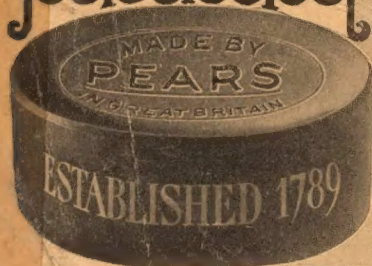
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view



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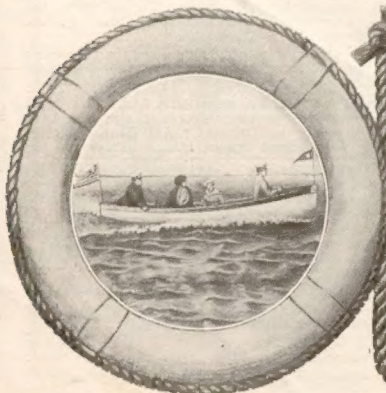
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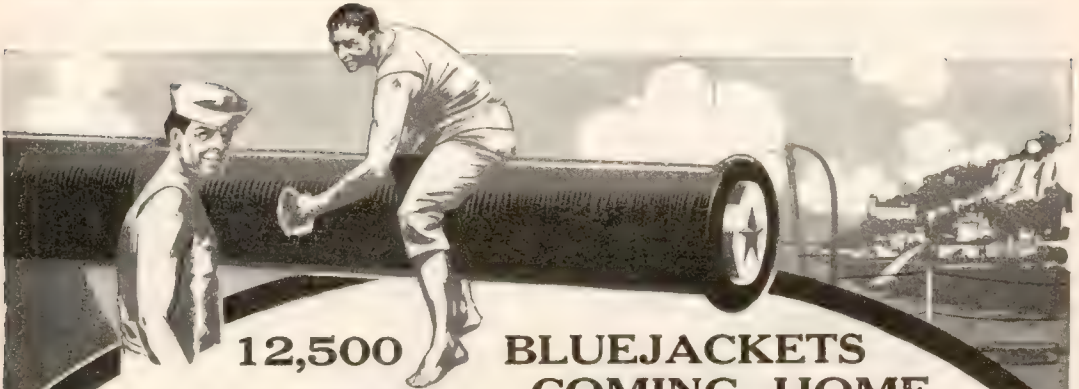
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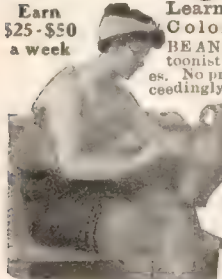
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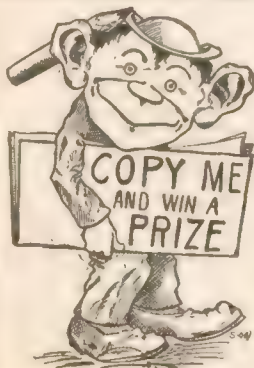
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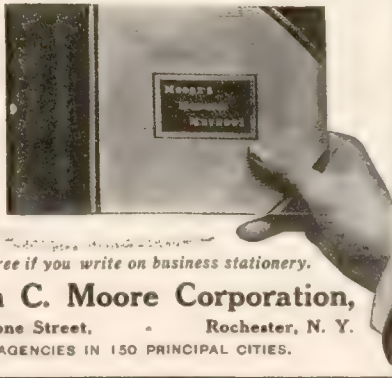
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Vol. LIX

MARCH, 1909.

No. 4

THE LURE OF EXCITEMENT.

By E. V. PRESTON.

Author of "Looking for Trouble," "A Crackerjack Cracksmen," "Section 539," etc.

A strange succession of circumstances, all appearing to point in one direction, and how they served to stimulate one man to combat them.

(COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE.)

CHAPTER I.

"FOR IDLE HANDS TO DO."

"LET'S play pirate!"

It wasn't a party of kids, either, their minds inflamed by nickel libraries.

It was a group of four young people lounging at ease on the veranda of a fashionable yacht-club, and the speaker who had voiced the bizarre suggestion was a girl with the hall-mark of upper Fifth Avenue all over her, from the way she did her hair to the tips of her dainty canvas shoes.

Her companions were Ridgely La Pont, the only son of old General La Pont, the millionaire; his cousin Vincent, dark and somewhat saturnine-looking, and myself, whose presence in this patrician gathering shall be explained later.

After the manner of the idle rich, my three associates had been bewailing the lack of anything to do, and had been rather enviously discussing the exploit reported in that morning's paper of a crowd of similar madcaps up in the Berkshires who had held up in true bandit style a coaching party of their friends, and then, after escaping unrecognized, and mystifying the authorities for a couple of days, had returned to each of their victims the booty taken, accompanied by a polite note of thanks.

"Why can't I ever think of anything like that?" grumbled Ridgely, the gilded scion of wealth, peevishly casting the

paper aside. "I'll bet those fellows had no end of a lark, for there's just enough spice of danger in a play like that to give it a fillip."

"So?" commented his cousin Vincent, with the suspicion of a sneer. "Well, there's no reason why you shouldn't emulate their brilliant example if you pine for that sort of thing. I believe there are a number of coaches running out from New York, and one of them passes not a dozen miles away from here."

"Oh, that would be mere copying," frowned the other. "The joke would lose all salt or savor upon a repetition. Don't you see, the dashing originality shown was all that made the venture worth while?"

"Then, why not try a modification of the scheme? There are manifold avenues of the sort to be exploited, ranging all the way from pocket-picking to second-story work and bank burgling; and I should fancy each of them filled with possibilities for excitement. Eh, Colonel Sullivan?" Vincent turned to me with almost a challenge in his glance.

I did not answer. He was treading upon delicate ground, probably out of a mere wanton pleasure in baiting me; but I was not going to rise to his hook.

Nor, to my relief, did his veiled taunt seem to carry any question to the minds of the others. Ridgely and the girl were manifestly more interested in the main purport of his talk than in any side issues which it might have opened up.

As Vincent finished, Ridgely looked quickly up, his eyes lighting at the prospect of a bit of novel adventure; but when he came to consider the proposition more carefully, his face again clouded over and he impatiently shook his head.

Neither was there, he plainly decided, anything fresh or inviting in this line of operations.

Miss Davis, however, equally struck with the suggestion, did not give up so readily. Her chin resting on her hand, she gazed out meditatively toward the flotilla of yachts which dotted the blue waters of the bay. Her roving glance chancing to fall upon her father's trim and graceful Waterwitch, a mischievous impulse all at once flashed into her face.

"Let's play pirates!" she cried eagerly. "It will be the very thing!"

"Play pirates?" Ridgely leaned forward in his chair. "How do you mean?"

"Why," with sparkling eyes, "the regular, conventional, Captain Kidd business. Hoist the Jolly Roger at the peak of your yacht, enlist us as your free company, and sail forth to be marauders of the seas. Don't you think that would furnish enough excitement for you?"

"Too much, I'm afraid." Ridgely was plainly regretful at having to oppose her. "It's a bully, good idea, all right, Eleanor; but there isn't a chance to get away with it.

"In the first place, everybody knows my boat, and it would be hard to get another suitable for the purpose which wouldn't be as readily recognized. But, waiving even that objection, what are we to do after we have made a seizure? We can't force people to walk the plank, or even if we did, we'd have to pull them out right away, and that would show us up in our true characters at the very start."

"Yes," I chimed in, willing to lend dissuasion to so hazardous a project; "and you can't scuttle their vessels, or run off with them. Either is a pretty serious offense; and if you tried any such funny business, you'd mighty soon find it out. There'd be a United States cruiser overhauling you before you had time to turn around."

But the girl only laughed merrily at our warnings, and snapped her fingers at our protests.

"Here, here," she cried, throwing up her slender arm as if to ward off a rain of missiles, "don't throw all the admiralty laws at me in a heap like that, and then top off with the United States navy. I don't want to scuttle ships, or hang anybody at the yard-arm, or indulge in any atrocities. All I am after is to have a harmless little frolic, and at the same time teach father a much-needed lesson; and this story of a mock hold-up from the Berkshires has shown me how it can be done.

"You see," she condescended to explain, "father is so afraid of running short of ready cash when off on a cruise as we are now, that he always carries a ridiculously large amount with him; and although I have pointed out, time and time again, that it is merely offering an incentive to robbery, and perhaps to our all being murdered in our berths, nothing I can urge has the slightest effect. He simply pooh-poohs my fears, and adds a thousand or two to his roll, out of spite.

"Why, do you know," lowering her voice and glancing nervously around to make sure that no waiter or other unauthorized person was within hearing, "he actually has no less than twenty thousand dollars aboard at this very minute, stuffed carelessly away in one of the drawers of his desk."

Out of the tail of my eye I thought I caught a quick, involuntary movement on the part of Vincent; but afterward judged that I must be mistaken, for, when I turned toward him, his expression was no more than one of polite but indifferent interest.

Ridgely, however, began to show signs of a kindling enthusiasm.

"By jinks, I see your lead now, Eleanor," he broke in; "and it's not so bad, at that. We're to come sailing up out of nowhere, eh, board the Waterwitch with a whoop, bind and gag all hands, and then absquatulate with the twenty thousand to return later, in the guise of heroic rescuers, and restore the stolen plunder?"

"There are only two objections, to my mind," he went on. "One is, that it's too dead easy—no hazard or risk to it, don't you know; and the other, that I hate to give your old man such a thundering scare."

"I want him scared," asserted the undutiful daughter, with a vindictive toss of her head—"scared so badly that I'll never be kept awake at nights again, wondering if a real visitation is about to be paid us.

"However," she added a shade dryly, "you may find him not so easy to frighten as you think; and as for risk and peril, he sleeps with a big navy revolver under his pillow which I fancy he would not be slow to use. I had intended drawing the loads from this; but if you would rather—"

"No, no," interrupted Ridgely hastily, "there is no need to change your plans in that regard on my account. We're merely out to give your respected pa a lesson in prudence, not to pose as targets for his marksmanship, or stain his hands with unnecessary bloodshed.

"On the level, though, Eleanor," dropping this bantering tone for one of frank approval, "the thing looks pretty good to me—even better than the play of those chaps up in the Berkshires. What do you say, fellows? Shall we put it through for our Maid Marian here?"

Vincent hesitated.

"I guess you'll have to count me out, for one, Ridge," he decided reluctantly. "It doesn't make any difference with the rest of you; but a struggling young attorney has to look to his dignity, and for me to help play a practical joke on one of the powers in Wall Street wouldn't be profitable advertising."

I, too, was about to decline; but Vincent gave me a covert kick underneath the leg of my chair, and, acting upon the hint, I turned my refusal into a rather awkward acceptance.

Then we fell to discussing details, and Vincent listened carefully while the rest of us debated and questioned; but presently, when everything was pretty well settled and the program of operations practically outlined, he arose with an excellent semblance of a yawn.

"Well," he smiled, "are you all agreed yet, or have you come to your senses and decided to call the crazy venture off? By Jove, I believe I have been asleep; for I couldn't tell you a thing that has been said. I guess I had better go take a swim and wake myself up. Will you join me, colonel?"

His tone was lazily indifferent; but he shot a glance at me which was equivalent to a command. I murmured my excuses to Ridgely and Miss Davis, and obediently followed him.

CHAPTER II.

HOW I GOT INTO THE PICTURE.

I GUESS I may as well confess at the outset that I have been pretty much of a bad egg.

Of the nine hundred and ten estimated ways of breaking the eighth commandment, I don't think more than ten have escaped my attention.

I have never knocked down fares on a street-car, or played politics with the money of widows and orphans, but that is chiefly because I have been neither a conductor nor a life insurance president.

Nor have I any valid excuse for my waywardness. I was as well born and reared as any boy has a right to expect, and my parents strove in every way to fit me for an honorable career.

I was sent to college, and could have entered any profession I chose; but as though by an unregenerate instinct, I drifted into crime. There are kinks and contradictions in human nature which no moralist has ever been able to explain.

Still, there is a modern school of thought which attributes all criminal impulses to insanity, and I don't know but that I am half-way inclined to agree with it.

I know at least that after having free-booted half over the world, and studied at first hand the prison systems of a dozen foreign countries, I suddenly came to a realization of the futility of my career.

I had just left Valparaiso in haste—not entirely of my own volition—and was casting about what to do next, when, as I stood on the deck of the little coastwise steamer, a cloud seemed to lift from my brain and I awoke as from a bad dream.

"What a fool I have been!" I caught myself muttering. "Here, I have been hammering away at this tack for ten years, and, owing to superior education, have had better success than most men in my line; yet what have I to show for it?"

A little computation showed me that,

counting in the terms I had passed behind the bars and the amounts I had spent to keep in front of them, my profession had netted me an average of three dollars a week—not decent wages for an ordinary day laborer.

Is it any wonder, then, when I considered the hardships which I had endured, the desperate chances I had taken, the life of constant apprehension and anxiety, that I asked myself what there was in it?

"By George," I decided, "I've had enough! I am going back to America to make a fresh start, and hereafter I am going to run straight."

That was an excellent resolution; but I soon discovered there were difficulties in the way.

When I landed in New York, my personal possessions consisted of three dollars and seventy-five cents and the clothes I stood in; so that it was imperative I raise enough to tide me over until I could get something to do.

I had no friends to whom I could apply, except those of that lower world which I was determined to let severely alone; no relatives, save a puritanical maiden aunt who had long since consigned me to perdition.

In my dilemma I thought of Vincent La Pont. He was not only a family connection in a way, but had also been a classmate of mine at college and had done me some service when I got into that first unfortunate scrape in Paris which landed me for two years at Devil's Island.

At any rate, he seemed the one person to whom I could feel free to tell my story and appeal for aid; yet, strangely enough, I hesitated to have any dealings with him, and that, too, mainly on the strength of my new resolutions.

He was a chap I had never been able quite to make out, you see. Straight as a string apparently, a model of rectitude and integrity in all his relations, I always had a fancy concerning him that there was a deeper and more sinister side to his nature which he took care not to reveal.

It had struck me at times that he might be a crafty Mephistopheles, pursuing in secret mockery a blameless path, so as the better in the end to effect some long-

cherished and unscrupulous aim; and then again some brave and disinterested act on his part, like coming to my assistance in Paris, would put me all at sea.

He was either a great saint or a master crook; which, I could not tell.

However, entertaining the doubts of him that I did, it will be understood how reluctant I was to expose the tender shoots of my good intentions to the withering blasts of his possible cynicism and disdain.

Still, it was practically Hobson's choice with me; so, in the end, I sought him out at his law office and stated my case.

He listened to me in silence, and when I had finished, rose to his feet and took a reflective turn up and down the room before he answered. Then he halted before my chair.

"I have a position open," he said quietly, "which I think you can fill to advantage, and which you can have—if you care to accept it."

I don't know why, but the slight pause, the rather significant emphasis on his closing words, aroused all my old suspicions of him.

My caution leaped on guard.

"You remember, I told you I intended to go straight hereafter, Vincent."

A faint sneer curled the corners of his lips. He leaned toward me.

"But just how straight, Herbert?" he questioned. "Too straight to pick up a possible twenty thousand dollars which might lie directly in your path?"

"Twenty thousand?"

"Yes."

And I had but three dollars in the world, with but small chance of getting immediate employment, and no one but himself upon whom I could call for succor.

I wrestled with temptation for a moment, his glance upon me seductive and compelling; then I metaphorically threw up my hands.

"What is it you want me to do?" I asked doggedly.

He resumed his seat, and dropped the attitude of strained, almost hypnotic, scrutiny which he had been holding over me.

"For the present, nothing. All I shall ask of you just now is to go down to the

Nawadaha Yacht Club as my guest, allowing me, of course, to fit you out with a suitable wardrobe and provide for all your necessary expenses."

"Hold on," I broke in a trifle dubiously. "I used to know a good many fellows belonging to the Nawadaha. Isn't there danger that I shall be recognized?"

"Hardly," he replied. "When it took me a good fifteen minutes to decide that you were the real Herbert Winstock, and not an impostor, I fancy your identity will be perfectly safe from the ordinary observer. They will never question that you are other than— What is the name you gave me?"

"Sullivan—Colonel Herbert Sullivan."

"Other than Colonel Herbert Sullivan, the South American political refugee and soldier of fortune."

"And that is all you want me to do, Vincent? Simply to hang up at Nawadaha and enjoy your hospitality?"

"All just now. When I have any further instructions, I will let you know. Here, I will give you a card to the club," seating himself at his desk, "and a check for your immediate requirements. I suppose, too, since you are somewhat of a stranger, I had better jot down the names of the best places for you to make your purchases."

As he spoke, he made note of a half-dozen addresses on the back of an old envelope, and handed it over to me with the other things.

Inadvertently, I turned the envelope over and, glancing at the superscription, looked up at him with a quick exclamation of surprise.

"Why!" I cried. "Surely, I can never be mistaken in this handwriting? There is none other in the world like it."

His eyelids lowered for a second; but when he spoke he showed no trace of annoyance or confusion.

"Oh, yes," he said, "your Aunt Priscilla is a client of mine. She often writes to me on matters connected with her estate."

He turned to his desk again, plainly indicating by his manner that he considered the interview at an end; but as I rose to go, he halted me as with an afterthought.

"By the way," he said, "do you remember my cousin Ridgely, the general's son?"

"Not very well. He was scarcely more than a child when I went away, you know. But why do you ask?"

"Oh, for no particular reason, except that you are apt to see a good deal of him down at Nawadaha. In fact, I shouldn't wonder if you and he became great chums. He is a charming fellow, in many ways, but sadly wild and reckless, I am afraid, and I know has been causing my uncle a good deal of anxiety of late. Perhaps, by your influence, you may be able to tone him down a bit."

That was all, and there wasn't even the quiver of an eyelash on his part to betray an ulterior meaning; but I understood, as well as if he had shouted it from the housetops, that I was expected not only to promote the intimacy at which he hinted, but also to foster rather than repress the exotic tendencies of his young kinsman.

In short, it was borne in upon me by a sort of sixth sense that the key to the enigma of my present engagement lay in Ridgely La Pont.

CHAPTER III.

I RECEIVE MY ORDERS.

I HAD small question as to the character of the instructions I was ultimately to receive. In my experience, inducements of twenty thousand dollars are not frequently held out for engagement in Sunday-school or rescue mission work.

So, although I was still in the dark as to what especial service would be required of me, one point was at last definitely settled in my mind. Vincent was a crook, and one of the most despicable kind, too—not the bluff, bold villain, but a scheming *Iago*, crafty and treacherous as a rattlesnake.

This much being decided, the next question was, how far I should join hands with him; for, although I am not denying that his twenty thousand loomed big to me, I was by no means ready—even for a prize like that—to dive back into the slimy waters from which I had but just emerged.

However, I argued, no such step was

yet demanded of me. I had only been asked to enjoy myself at his expense.

Of course, there was an implied condition that I would be ready for further service when called upon; but I decided that it would be time enough to meet that contingency when it arose. If I did not like the proposition submitted to me, I could refuse.

In the meantime, my destitution relieved, I would be sumptuously housed, clothed, and fed, and would have an opportunity to look around for a suitable opening.

Nor did I suffer any qualms of conscience at accepting these benefits from Vincent, when in the end I intended to throw him down. If I was "doing" him, it was no more than what he was planning to do to some one else; and that, too, I had no doubt upon a vastly more extensive scale.

Accordingly, I went down to Nawadaha, and, strange as it may seem, had the time of my life.

On the shores of a lovely bay, not too far from New York to forbid an occasional taste of metropolitan amusements, yet far enough away to give the fresh air and sense of isolation which the holiday-seeker demands, the place was ideally located.

Then, too, after roughing it about the world as long as I had done, the ease and luxury were like balm to my soul. The famed cooking of the club, its host of good fellows always on hand, its soft-footed attendants ready to anticipate one's slightest wish, the daily spins out on the water, and the long, lounging hours in a comfortable chair on the shaded veranda, all suited me down to the ground.

And finally, to cap the climax, a squadron of visiting yachts put in with a bevy of pretty girls aboard; and we had music and dancing every night, and the joy of feminine society, with Eleanor Davis, the lively daughter of old Potiphar Davis, the financier, as leader of the revels.

Yet, amid all this diversion and merrymaking, I was not unmindful of my orders. I was supposed, as I understood it, to get in with young Ridgely La Pont, and I certainly did so.

Indeed, I don't believe I could have

helped it, if I had tried; for the lad seemed attracted to me from the very start, and I must confess that I was no less drawn toward him.

And he was certainly a winning chap, frank and ingenuous, and unspoiled, for all his wealth. A shade indiscreet, perhaps, as the result of his overflowing high spirits, but not at all the profligate I had been led to picture him from Vincent's description.

I learned, however, that an unfortunate breach existed between him and his father, dating from the time that Ridgely had been expelled from college on account of some boyish escapade, and constantly widened since by clashes over further "disreputable outbreaks," as the old general termed them.

The son's complaint, as nearly as I could gather, was that as stories of so vile and garbled a nature were accepted unquestioningly against him, he scorned to demean himself by entering a defense.

"The old gentleman thinks I'm a thorough bad lot, I guess," he said with an assumption of indifference; "and, if it pleases him to hold that sort of an opinion, why should I care?"

"I can tell him, though," he added, "he's going to have a job of it forcing me to do what he wants. He would like to have me go into business, and settle down and get married; and between you and me and the gate-post, nothing would suit me better—that is, the settling down and going into business part of it. But let him think that he'd had any hand in pulling me into it? No, sir! Why, Colonel Sullivan, I'd rather go down right now and jump off the dock!"

After that it wasn't hard for me to see just how the variance between the two proud natures had arisen.

The old general, keenly ambitious for his only son, had been inclined to lend too ready an ear to the tales of scandal-mongers, and to treat minor derelictions with more importance than they deserved; while the boy, smarting under the injustice of it, had grown more and more rebellious, until now he took a certain defiant pleasure in thwarting and opposing whatever his father wished.

I believed, too, although I could not of course say positively, that the most

of this tale-bearing could be charged up to plausible, soft-spoken Cousin Vincent.

And yet I couldn't see what Vincent had to gain. How was he to benefit by this dissension and antagonism between his kinsmen?

The more I tried to poke into the muddy waters of his concealed purpose, the more perplexed I became.

I probed the man himself when he came down for his occasional week-end and overnight stays; but it was precious little satisfaction I got.

Suave and smiling and sphinx-like, he would put off my inquiries, and call in Ridgely to join us in some excursion or other pastime he had planned for our delectation.

"By Jove, he is a good fellow!" murmured the warm-hearted boy, gazing appreciatively after Vincent, as he left us at the conclusion of one of these sojourns. "I don't know as I would have much of a yelp coming if the governor should disinherit me in his favor. He certainly deserves all the good that can befall him."

I turned quickly.

"Has your father ever mentioned any such purpose?"

"Oh, yes! He threatens it every time I make him the least bit hot under the collar. The only thing which keeps him from it, he says, is because he knows that Vincent would not let me suffer."

A great light burst suddenly upon me, and I saw at last the motive and aim of my scoundrelly employer. He was actually planning to defraud Ridgely of his birthright—had probably been working upon the insidious design for years.

Callous as I was to evil, the utter ruthlessness and black duplicity of the mind which could fashion such a plot, and hang relentlessly to it for so long, fairly staggered me.

I was convinced, however, that I had stumbled upon the truth, and but one point still puzzled me. What part did he intend me to play in the expected dénouement? But to ascertain this I realized that I would have to await a revelation from him.

Thus four weeks passed, and he gave no sign—showed me by neither word nor intimation—that he looked to me for

aught else than to enjoy myself as his favored guest.

Then came the arrival of the visiting yachts, with Vincent dropping down to take part in the festivities; and when that conference between the four of us on the clubhouse veranda ended with the significant glance from him, bidding me follow, I knew that the hour for my "further instructions" had come.

Characteristically, though, he said nothing until we had swum around the bay for fully half an hour and had clambered up on the float to rest, our legs dangling in the water. Then he turned to me with a question far from what I was anticipating.

"What do you think," he asked, "of the feeling between Ridgely and Eleanor Davis? Is their friendship apt to develop into anything more serious?"

I caught the trend of his mind in a second. A marriage, or even an engagement, with so acceptable a girl would do more than anything else to reconcile the old general to his son; and might put a serious, if not destructive, spoke in Mr. Vincent's wheel. Naturally, he would be determined to prevent such a consummation at any hazard.

Perhaps, too, it suddenly struck me, he might have another and more personal reason at stake?

I swung sharply about on him, my eyes alight with suspicion; and for the first time in our acquaintance he failed to bear my scrutiny. Reddening, he turned his own away in confusion.

"Oh, I don't think you need worry yourself on that score," I answered half sneeringly, yet truthfully enough, as far as that went. "Ridgely admires her immensely, I believe, as who could help doing? But marriage, I fancy, is a thing far from his thoughts, and I don't imagine she has any stronger inclination in that direction.

"No," I added, a shade maliciously, "it is too eminently suitable a match ever to come to a head. In the end, she will probably take up with some dirty hound in no way worthy of her."

I thought he gave a sigh of relief at my assurance; but he did not pursue the subject, turning instead to a discussion of the piratical cruise which Miss Davis had proposed.

"Oh, that will never come off!" I broke in. "That was just chatter to pass away an idle morning."

He flashed a look of quick irritation upon me.

"I tell you it must come off," he declared, smiting his fist down upon his knee; "and I look to you to see that it does. Shame them, deride them, cajole or coax them, do what you choose; but on no account let them back down from the undertaking. If you fail, then you and I break right there and then."

"Now, listen to me," giving me no chance to say whether I would or would not follow his dictates, "this thing, as I understand it, is to be pulled off immediately after the hop at the clubhouse to-night, with Miss Davis going on board the *Waterwitch* to prepare for your reception, and you and Ridgely putting off later in the launch to play the part of the actual pillagers."

"Well and good; but there is one point which I must especially charge you not to overlook. When you start out from the dock, be sure and take one of the lanterns of the launch, and wave it over your head three times."

"Why?"

"H'm! Perhaps there may be a police-boat waiting for just such a signal."

I gave a bounce which nearly unseated me from my slippery perch.

"So that is the game, is it?" I cried. "This harmless frolic, like many another that has gone before, is to be represented to General La Pont as a vicious and disgraceful affair; but with this difference: that, having the stamp of police action on it this time, you hope to so enrage him that he will substitute your name for Ridgely's in his will without delay?"

"Ah!" Vincent gazed at me for a full minute, an unfathomable expression on his face. "That is the way you size things up, eh?"

"Sure. Set a crook to catch a crook every time. And I'm not saying that you haven't worked it pretty smooth up to now, Vincent; but I believe in the present case your eagerness is leading you astray."

"How so?"

"Well, although you may not see it, this carefully arranged scheme for

Ridgely's arrest and humiliation is bound to end in a fiasco. Isn't Miss Davis sure to come out and clear him as soon as he gets into actual trouble?"

My companion smiled sarcastically.

"You call me pretty 'smooth,' Herbert; yet credit me with a lack of even ordinary shrewdness. Did you really believe that I could be such a bungler as to overlook or fail to cover so obvious a point? No, Miss Davis will not be able to save Ridgely, and I think the case against him will be fairly complete when it is shown that he was taken in the company of Herbert Winstock, the notorious thief."

I raised my head sharply.

"Hold on!" I cried. "I didn't bargain for any such stipulation as that. My past is dead, I'd have you know, and I don't propose to resurrect it for you or any other man."

"Oh, yes, you will," he rejoined coolly. "Not only for the twenty thousand you will get, but also because I, too, hold the key to that burial vault you were just speaking of."

It was true. He had me in his power.

Should I refuse his demands, he could, by exposing me, close the doors to every avenue of honest employment in my face, and it was idle for me to dream of denouncing him in turn. I was discredited before I began.

Yet I was determined that he should not drag me back into the mire—determined, too, that Ridgely should be saved. How, though?

To wash my hands of Vincent now, even if it was unattended by unpleasant consequences to myself, would simply mean that he would engage some other and less scrupulous agent to carry out his project.

There was but one course open to me that I could see—to meet craft with craft, guile with guile. I must pretend to comply with his wishes, follow where he pointed to the very end; and then, when he was about to reap his triumph, and I had the proofs in my hand to back up my words, step forward and topple over his house of cards with a single push.

Cunningly, therefore, I argued and protested for a time; but at last yielded my feigned submission.

One last question I asked, though, deeming it wise to assume a purely mercenary pose.

"When do I get my twenty thousand?" I said. "I suppose you will tell me that I must wait until you come into your inheritance; but that doesn't suit me a little bit. The old general may live a dozen years yet, and who can say what may happen in that time?"

"No," I grumbled, "once known as the heir of a millionaire, you will have no difficulty in raising any amount you choose, and I therefore must have my pay as soon as a will is signed in your favor."

He reflected a moment, thoughtfully stroking his chin.

"Very well," he said at last, "it shall be as you suggest. You are entitled to your money as soon as I am acknowledged my uncle's heir."

"But," and he looked at me steadily, "you need not have been disturbed by a fear of having to wait. I am very sure that my uncle will not long survive the signing of this new will."

"You would—" I gasped.

"Never mind what I would do. It is sufficient for you to know that I take no chances."

And with that he dived off the float, and started to swim for shore.

demanding of him. "Have you and our Maid Marian been indulging in a tiff?"

"Not at all," stiffly. "I am simply leaving her free to one who has a better claim upon her."

Involuntarily, his eyes turned toward his cousin.

"You mean—" I exclaimed incredulously.

"Ssh!" And he grabbed me by the arm. "I should not have spoken. Vincent told it to me in confidence. Still, since I have betrayed him so far, I may as well let you know it all. Yes, they are engaged, although public announcement is not to be made, I understand, until next fall. At least, that is what Vincent says."

"Oh, that is what Vincent says, is it? But what does she say?"

"She?" impatiently. "Of course I have not spoken to her about it, nor shall I do so until she first mentions the matter to me. It is by her desire that the thing is being kept such a dead secret."

I paid an involuntary tribute of admiration to Cousin Vincent. Who but he would have dared so bold a stratagem to remove a dangerous rival from his path?

It was his almost uncanny insight into character which gave him his power; for he must have known that, with any man less delicately honorable than Ridgely, so flimsy a device was foredoomed to failure.

Still, so far as I could make out, he did not reap much benefit from his ruse. Whether owing to the defection of her usual cavalier, or from some other cause, Miss Davis was plainly piqued and out of temper; and, for all his opportunity to monopolize her society, Vincent looked far from radiant.

As the evening wore on, his bearing grew depressed, his face lined and haggard; and when the dance was over he did not join the rest of us on the veranda, but, gruffly declining Ridgely's invitation to a cigar, hurried off to his room on the plea that he was tired and had to get up early in the morning to return to the city.

Some minutes later I thought I saw a figure strongly resembling his skulking through the trees at the side of the house and heading for the shore; but it passed

CHAPTER IV.

UNDER THE BLACK FLAG.

IT was well after twelve that night when the hop at the clubhouse ended and the last merry boatload of guests put off from the pier. Then there were, of course, a lot of fellows who wanted to sit up after everything was over and "make a night of it"; so, as we had reckoned, two o'clock had struck before Ridgely and I were ready to start out.

The gay, buoyant humor which usually characterized him had evaporated early in the evening, and all through the hop he had seemed taciturn and morose.

Ordinarily, too, he would have danced a dozen times with Eleanor Davis; but to-night he let her severely alone, hardly deigning to so much as glance in her direction.

"What is the matter with you?" I

so swiftly that before I could make sure it was gone.

And now I began to grow impatient; for, willing as I had been at the start to see our mock buccaneering abandoned, I was now even more anxious to bring it to a head. It was the one way, I knew, to force matters to their conclusion, and once and for all scotch Vincent's powers for evil.

I had feared for a time, owing to the signs of dissension in our ranks, that the project would have to be given up for that night at least; but both Ridgely and Eleanor had assured me somewhat tartly that they had no intention of backing out of our compact, and now all that was delaying a start was the presence of the "gang."

Yet, still the interchange of stories and experiences continued unabated, and some of the "late trick" contingent were even drifting into song; but gradually yawns took the place of anecdotes, and "We Won't go Home till Morning" ceased its troubling.

One by one the club members straggled off to bed, and we were left alone with no one but a sleepy steward ostentatiously turning off lights and carrying in chairs.

"You needn't wait any longer, Thomas," said Ridgely, turning to this man. "The colonel and I want to finish our cigars, and we will lock up when we come in. Good night to you, and pleasant dreams."

"Good night, sir."

We heard him pass through the house, and back to his own quarters, where the light shone for a few moments from his window up near the roof, and then went out. There was no other sign of illumination from the clubhouse except the lowered lamp in the hall, no sound save the faint snoring of some weary members upon the second floor. Our time had come.

Ridgely rose with a quick sigh of relief, and, extinguishing the light in the hall, brought out, from where he had hidden them in readiness, a rough coat and cap for each of us.

Donning these, and making sure that the revolvers and masks we had in our pockets were safe, we tiptoed off the porch and down the path to the landing.

The moon had set some time before, and in the almost Egyptian darkness we had nothing to guide us except our familiarity with the way and the soft lap-lap of the waves against the shore; but this in no wise frightened us from our enterprise, for we had taken careful note of the exact position of the Waterwitch, and had no doubt of our ability to reach her.

What did serve to disconcert us a bit, though, and raise fears of possible trouble, was the additional fact that a heavy fog had started to roll in from the sea, and was fast covering the bay with its impenetrable blanket.

Indeed, by the time we had reached the landing it had grown so thick that Ridgely paused uncertainly, and ventured a query as to whether we might not better postpone the enterprise to another night, after all.

"On account of this fog?" I asked with a touch of sarcasm. "Pooh! there's no more chance of going astray in this bay than in a mill-pond. However—"

"However, what?" sharply.

"Oh, merely that I thought you might be ready to give up the madcap freak altogether. I am far from easy in my own mind at having abetted you and Miss Davis in it, and if you feel like backing out, my boy, don't hesitate on my account. I suppose she will probably keep on waiting up for us; but the fog will serve us as an excuse."

As I had anticipated, that clinched his wavering resolution.

"Who's talking about backing out? Don't be a fool," he growled; and springing down into the launch, he busied himself in starting up the engine.

I followed, and, while his back was turned, picked up a lantern from under one of the seats in the stern and, obedient to instructions, waved it three times over my head.

"Here!" he cried, happening to turn as I made the third pass. "What are you doing there?"

"Trying to put this blamed thing out. There's no use advertising our movements by so much light, if any one should chance to be watching along shore."

"H'm," he sniffed. "Those gyrations of yours are a good deal more apt

to give us away, to my mind. Besides, I'll have need of that lantern up forward here," taking it away from me, "to get an occasional peep at the compass. It's the only way we'll be able to know where we are going in this sort of weather."

Then, never dreaming of such a thing as treachery afoot, he let the incident drop, and headed the launch, her exhaust carefully muffled, out toward the bay.

And once outside, the justice of his demand for the lantern was easily apparent.

Talk about seeing anything, through that murk! A hundred feet from the pier, and the house, the shore-line, even the club's red-and-green beacon-light, were all blotted out as completely as though they did not exist. Without the magnetic-needle we would have been lost indeed.

But the unerring little monitor stood us in good stead; and very shortly there loomed up, dim and wraithlike out of the haze ahead, the graceful white hull and unmistakable bowsprit of the Waterwitch.

"Now for it!" muttered Ridgely tensely; and running the launch in under the yacht's quarter, he caught a line and clambered up the side.

He evidently expected me to tie up and follow him; but the tide was running pretty strong, and before I could do it, I had drifted under the yacht's bows and around to the other side.

Then I delayed just a minute longer; for I thought I caught the chug-chug of another launch off to the right, and waited to see if it was the police-boat coming up so soon.

Convinced, though, in a second or two, that my ears must have deceived me, I stood up with the line in my hand to make fast.

And just then, from the deck above me, pealed out a woman's shrill cry for help!

for me to report them in anything like orderly sequence.

With the ringing out of the cry from the yacht, a launch, similar to our own, suddenly appeared out of the fog and ran close in under the vessel's side.

"The police-boat," I thought, and prepared to give myself up; for Vincent had told me that both Ridgely and I were to be taken into custody at the start, and I released later on turning State's evidence.

But almost immediately I recognized my mistake. In this launch there was but one man, and, instead of a demand for surrender, he gave a snort of dismay at sight of me and shot off into the darkness faster than he had come.

I had small opportunity to speculate concerning him or what he might have wanted, however; for my attention was now drawn back to the yacht by the unmistakable sounds of a struggle upon the deck—a scuffle of footsteps, the smack-smack of interchanged blows, the panting of two men at combat.

Not more than twenty seconds of it altogether, probably, although it seemed longer to me, while I hurriedly looked about for some place to tie up, so that I, too, might leave the launch and see what was doing.

Then—bang! The sharp report of a revolver shattered the silence, seeming like the roar of a cannon within those confining walls of fog; and hard upon it, a man with a woman in his arms sprang to the rail, and, leaning over, peered down at me.

Ridgely I never doubted it to be, and, standing up in the launch, I called to him to lower his burden to me; but he had no sooner obeyed, and was himself preparing to follow the unconscious figure I had received, than another man with a leap like an infuriated tiger bore him to one side, and, passing him, landed in a huddle in our boat.

The first chap, losing his balance, whirled half-way around, clawed at the empty air, and then, with a strangled cry, fell splash into the black water between us and the yacht.

Lights were now flashing out all over the Waterwitch, and there was a commotion and hubbub awaking within her like that in a hive of suddenly aroused

CHAPTER V.

THREE IN A BOAT.

IN the next few moments things happened so fast and furiously that it is hard

bees. Her search-light blazed out ahead, its wide beam sweeping hither and thither over the water.

But we were drawing rapidly away; for with me encumbered by the swooning woman, and my companion still in a heap where he had fallen, the launch had taken matters into its own hands.

His fall had given us an impetus away from the yacht, and, our helm uncontrolled, our engine racing like mad, we were streaking off into the fog like an arrow.

Already the *Waterwitch* was only discernible as a row of blurred, and fading lights.

I saw the man who had joined me struggling to gain his feet, and, as he was nearer the wheel than I, shrieked to him:

"Put about! Put about! Don't you know there is a man in the water back there?"

Before he could obey, the perilously speeding engine choked, gurgled, and, with a dying gasp, came to a stop. And at the same moment the fog shut down like a curtain between us and the yacht. No longer was even her search-light visible.

These successive events seem perhaps to have taken time as I have described them, but actually they all happened in a heap. Not more than two minutes had passed, or at the most three, since I had been startled by that shrill cry from the deck of the *Waterwitch*.

And now I was stalled in a fog-bank with a dead engine, and Ridgely La Pont, who, as I knew, was no swimmer, struggling for life somewhere back there in the darkness. Truly, our farce-comedy was becoming melodrama with a vengeance.

Still, I didn't propose to let the boy drown if there was any possible chance of aiding him; so, tossing some cushions into the bottom of the launch as a couch for the unconscious girl, I laid her down and sprang forward to assist my unknown shipmate where he was pottering and fussing with the engine.

And right there I received one of the most complete surprises of my life; for, as he turned up his face in response to my volley of questions, the lantern's gleam revealed his features.

It was Ridgely himself.

I staggered back, so amazed and confounded that I was still scarcely able to grasp the truth.

"Then, who—who," I stammered, "is the man back there in the water?"

"My cousin Vincent," he answered.

Somehow, this did not astonish me at all. Before he spoke I seemed to know by intuition that if the man with me was Ridgely, the other must be Vincent; and a dozen circumstances, hitherto unconsidered, flashed up to explain the presence of the plotter on the yacht.

This was the reason for the sudden start he gave when Miss Davis had mentioned her father's penchant for having ready cash around, and also the reason for his assurance to me that not even the word of the yacht owner's daughter could clear Ridgely of the stigma about to be placed upon him.

Realizing that the blame for whatever was done that night would inevitably be laid to his cousin's wild exploit, he had seen an opportunity not only to advance his plans, but also to secure without risk the twenty thousand dollars aboard the *Waterwitch*.

I knew now it must have been he I had seen sneaking around the corner of the clubhouse shortly after the close of the hop. That second launch, too, which had appeared so mysteriously out of the fog and had fled at sight of me, was evidently the conveyance he had used to cross the bay, and had been waiting around to pick him up.

Oh, what a cunning, secretive dog, I thought; he did not confine this subsidiary project of his even to me.

"Nevertheless," I muttered, unconsciously carrying on my meditations aloud, "we cannot leave him back there to drown."

Then I noticed for the first time that the blood was streaming down Ridgely's face.

"Good Heavens, man," I cried, "you are wounded!"

"Merely a scratch," he assured me. "He took a crack at me with his gun; but fortunately his aim was bad, and although it floored me for a second, I got off with nothing worse than a glancing wipe across the temple. He meant to do for me all right, though," he added grimly.

"Still," I repeated, "we cannot leave him back there to die."

He cast a significant glance toward the stalled engine for answer.

"Not much chance of our doing anything that I can see; we are broken down for fair. However," less relentlessly, "I don't really believe that he is in any especial danger. Satan usually looks out for his own, you know; and, besides, he is an expert swimmer, capable of keeping afloat for hours if need be.

"What bothers me more," with a note of real concern in his voice, "is Miss Davis's plight. This piston seems to be jammed for keeps; yet we simply must contrive some way of getting her back to the yacht."

And, picking up his wrench, he started a fresh attack upon the balky mechanism.

"Miss Davis?" I gave a start; for, strangely enough, in the confusion of the affair, the identity of the woman tossed down into my arms had never even suggested itself, and while talking to Ridgely I had for the moment actually forgotten her presence on board.

"Is the girl back there Miss Davis?" I demanded. "Then, I should say it *was* important to get her back to the yacht. What's the matter with her, anyway?"

"Matter with her?" dropping the wrench. "Isn't she all right?"

"Well, probably it's only a swoon, but on the other hand she may be hurt."

He waited to hear no more, but, with an inarticulate exclamation, sprang to his feet, pushing me unceremoniously aside. In another second he was bending over the unconscious girl, calling her name in agonized entreaty and striving vainly to arouse her.

"My God, colonel," he said wildly, as I made my way back to him, "she looks as though she were dead!"

I tried to quiet his apprehensions, pointing out to him that she was undoubtedly breathing, and explaining that to faint was as natural with women in times of stress as for us to swear; but I must confess that it was with little success. He did not regain anything approaching calmness until, under our combined ministrations, our fair patient began to show unmistakable signs of returning life.

She stirred, her breast heaved, a faint sigh parted her lips, and her eyelids fluttered upward. For a moment she lay silent, gazing up at the striped canopy of the launch in the lantern-light; then a little puzzled frown deepened between her eyes.

"What has happened to me?" she murmured.

"Eleanor"—Ridgely leaned over her solicitously—"don't be alarmed. You have—"

But at the sight of him a sudden wave of the most intense repulsion swept up into her face.

She struggled to her elbow, and threw her head back, her eyes blazing with scorn.

"You?" she cried with withering emphasis. "You! Don't you dare touch me, you miserable thief!"

Her glance roved swiftly over the yacht, and she seemed to realize all at once her position—that she was alone with us on our tiny craft, separated from her father and the Waterwitch, dependent solely on us two for protection.

With a gesture of utter despair, she cast herself down again upon the cushions, and, burying her face in her hands, burst into a storm of tears.

CHAPTER VI.

"MY LADY DISDAIN."

If there is anything which can more effectually disconcert two grown men, and make them look and act like a couple of boobies, than a woman's tears, I don't know it.

Ridgely and I stood helpless before the unexpected outburst, feeling as mean as though we had been caught stealing sheep, eager to assuage the torrent of distress, yet at a loss just how to set about it.

Several times he feebly attempted to interpose, calling her by name and striving to speak to her; but on each occasion she turned from him so shudderingly and with such a vehement access of sobs, that at last I felt it up to me to take a hand.

"Here, young man, you've done just about enough for one time," I told him sternly, though what he had done amiss

I could not for the life of me make out. "You go for'd there and get your engine to working. I'll explain how things stand to Miss Davis."

I remember I blamed him severely for her weeping, albeit without rime or reason, and he must have felt a sense of guilt himself, for he meekly obeyed my injunction, and, withdrawing, left me free to deal with the problem.

I cleared my throat; and advanced a step nearer to her.

"My dear" (I assumed perhaps more of a parental tone than my six years' seniority to Ridgely warranted, but that was what I thought the situation needed) — "my dear, there is no call for you to disturb yourself so grievously. True, through an unfortunate series of accidents, you are out alone with us on this launch, and we find it impossible to restore you at once to the Waterwitch; but you should realize yourself that there is absolutely no danger. The sea is calm, there is no danger of our being run down here in the bay, the fog will undoubtedly rise presently, and then we can make known our whereabouts and signal for assistance."

Ah, her sobs were noticeably lessening; she lay quiet now for the most part, merely showing her agitation by an occasional convulsive tremor. I began quite to plume myself upon my success in allaying her terrors.

"As for the rest, my dear young lady," I went on airily, "you know, of course, that you are perfectly safe with us, and that every consideration we can show—"

But she reared up from her pose of drooping dejection like some goaded lioness.

"Safe?" she flared, and such was the contempt in her tone that I actually winced before it. "Safe with *you two*!"

And then she launched into a storm of invective which showed as nearly as I could gather that she believed our story of a broken-down engine to be pure sham, its stoppage merely a ruse to evade pursuit, and our real purpose to carry her off in the hope of obtaining a ransom.

"Well, I can only submit," she concluded with a superb gesture; "but, in the meantime, do not insult my intelligence by telling me that I am safe, or that I shall receive 'every consideration.'"

Faugh, the only consideration I ask of either of you is to let me alone!"

"But—but you are laboring under a monstrous error, Miss Davis," I stammered, when at last I was able to edge in a word. "Why, your own common sense ought to tell you that there is nothing in such a charge as you bring against us. I'll admit that I perhaps am not well enough known to you to be absolved, but certainly Ridgely La Pont is above so unworthy a suspicion. Have you ever found him other than square, above-board, and chivalric?"

She weakened a trifle at that.

"No-o," she faltered, "and if anybody else had told me such a thing of him, I would never have believed it. But," with a despairing shake of her head, "can I doubt the evidence of my own eyes?"

"Where is the motive, though, for such a dime-novel exploit as you ascribe to him?" I cried. "You knew all about our proposed expedition in advance. How, then, can you make such absurd charges as that he really meant to steal your father's money, or to abduct you for ransom? Men do not undertake such desperate measures except under stress of great need, and certainly Ridgely has no—"

"Oh, yes, I knew all about the proposed expedition," she interrupted impatiently. "I knew a good deal more than you two thought I did, only I wouldn't believe what I was told."

"Told?"

"Yes, told. Told that you would come secretly and without giving me my signal, to steal the money, and then return according to our prearranged plan and appear to be as much surprised as anybody when the twenty thousand dollars was found missing. Yet I would not believe. I was so loyal to him that I would not even watch to see if such a thing could be true. It was only when I heard his stealthy step upon the companionway, and, creeping out, found him actually rifling my father's desk, that I was at last convinced."

"I am willing to grant," she went on less severely, "that the intention to carry me off and obtain this ransom may not have been born in his mind until I caught him at his nefarious work and he knew

that I had recognized him. But how can I doubt now? Did he not himself hiss in my ear, as he seized me in his arms and carried me toward the deck: 'Well, somebody will have to pay richly for this?'

"But the motive?" I again interposed. "What possible—"

"Motive? Oh, Colonel Sullivan, you cannot deceive me. I also learned to-night in just how desperate a strait Ridgely really is; how he is harassed for funds to maintain him in his follies, and how his father is on the point of casting him off.

"And to think," her voice blazed out in scorn, "that when I heard it, I was so sorry I cried. Cried, while I was in my stateroom waiting for him to give the signal; and then stepped out to meet him face to face, a prowling thief!"

I began to see some light now upon the preposterous conception which the girl had sprung and which at first fairly dazed me by its fantastic absurdity.

She had simply mistaken one cousin for the other, and in her swooning condition had been unconscious of being transferred from the clutches of Vincent to the protection of Ridgely.

It was easy enough, too, to comprehend where she had heard those reports to Ridgely's discredit, which, though false, served to her mind as a complete proof and confirmation of his guilt.

I tried to set her straight and show up Ridgely in a more favorable light; but she would have none of my explanations.

"It is useless to talk to me any further, Colonel Sullivan," she said haughtily, "nor do I really see any reason for it, when I must ultimately learn the truth. However, you may have some concealed purpose in keeping up the farce which I do not at present perceive. I want you both to know, though, that I understand the situation perfectly, and, since I cannot do otherwise, accept it. I shall not annoy you any more than I can help with my feminine tears, and, when you ask it, shall be ready to write such a letter as you may dictate, urging my father to pay my ransom without delay; for I would consider any money well spent which can relieve me of even an hour of your society.

"I make one stipulation, though," she

went on in the same unyielding tone, "that neither of you speak to me again, unless it is absolutely necessary for the management of the boat, or to give me some directions as to my own movements, and that in such case the message shall be conveyed to me by you rather than Mr. La Pont."

She meant it, too; there could be no question about that. Every word she uttered was so charged with contempt that it stung like the stroke of a whiplash across my face.

I glanced at Ridgely, and saw that he, too, was writhing under the undeserved scourge of her disdain.

He was sitting all hunched up a short distance away, and, although he had taken no part in the colloquy, had of course heard everything which was said.

Then he broke the silence.

"Let it be as Miss Davis wishes," he said stiffly. "In fact, suppose you stretch a line across the launch there amidships, colonel, so that she may have the whole stern to herself, and there will be no question of our invading her territory."

Before I did so, however, I managed to ask him in a whisper if he deemed so much liberty perfectly wise, considering that in her hysterical mood she might take it into her head to jump overboard. He merely curled his lip at the suggestion.

"She will not jump overboard," he muttered. "She'd be afraid I might go in after her, and she hates me so she'd endure anything rather than have me touch her."

Accordingly, the line was stretched, and Miss Davis, retiring to the farthest limits of her section, seated herself with her back toward us and gazed fixedly out into the fog, never deigning to cast even so much as a glance in our direction.

Ridgely and I tinkered for a while with the clogged motor, but, finding the task beyond us, presently gave up the attempt to make it go, and resigned ourselves to waiting for the fog to rise—an interminable wait apparently; for although our watches told us the dawn must have come, there was as yet no rift discernible in the encompassing masses of vapor.

He did not seem inclined for conversation; so, having received only monosyllabic or very brief answers to my several

efforts to lead him into a discussion of the night's adventures, I decided to respect his mood.

At length, however, while I pondered over my pipe, an idea struck me which so aroused my curiosity that, finding no solution at hand, I finally ventured to broach it to him.

"Doesn't it seem odd to you," I said, "that drifting around as we are, and with the bay so full of yachts, we have thus far failed to run into any of them?"

He roused a bit at that, and studied for a moment.

"Well, I don't know," he ruminated. "Most of the yachts are over on the west side of the bay, you remember, whereas both wind and tide have been carrying us to the east."

"Not far, though, certainly," I put in. "I suppose, of course, that we have moved a bit, but the sea has been so quiet until lately that, if any one had asked me, I should almost have been ready to take oath we were standing still."

"Don't be reckless in your swearing. The tide here runs pretty strong, and it turned a couple of hours ago."

"Yes," he calculated, glancing at his watch, "I should not be surprised if we had traveled a good four or five knots since we left the Waterwitch. Nothing is more deceptive than—"

He broke off sharply as the launch's snub nose was lifted under pressure of a good-sized swell and a current of foam raced past the side.

"Geewhillikens!" he muttered, and, stepping to the rail, gazed down toward the oily, black water.

"Sea is freshening up a shade, isn't it?" I commented, following him. "Well, that ought to mean a disappearance of this confounded fog."

"That isn't it, colonel," and he turned a grave and perturbed face toward me. "The truth is, we are out in the ocean; and—what is going to become of us the Lord only knows!"

CHAPTER VII.

THE FATE OF THE PEACEMAKER.

IT was certainly a situation calculated to make a man turn a trifle pale around the gills.

Out on the broad Atlantic in a dinky launch without motive-power, and with a woman on our hands. Oh, we were like to have enough excitement to satisfy any one's craving before we were through with this adventure!

To say nothing of the imminent danger of being run down in the fog, for we were right in the track of the big ocean liners—we were destitute of food, or any adequate protection against the elements. Yet, we might be tossed about for days as the sport of winds and waves before we were picked up, or drifted to any shore.

No wonder that Ridgely snatched up his wrench once more and started a fairly frenzied assault upon the obstinate engine. I was not feeling exactly cheerful myself, and I will confess that, for the first time in years, something like a prayer crossed my lips.

"Oh, Lord," I remember I framed it up, "I haven't much right to ask any favors, and I don't know that I do, as far as I myself am concerned. I'll take my chances. But, oh, Lord, this boy and girl, here, are on the level, and it doesn't seem right that they should get the worst of it. If you can do anything for them, please don't hold off on my account, or let them suffer merely because they have a Jonah like me along with them."

But neither hammering nor appeals to Heaven seemed able to induce the engine to start, or to dispel the fog; so, presently, we gave over our unavailing efforts and resumed our former listless vigil in the bow.

The girl still maintained her attitude of stony indifference, holding her eyes sedulously aloof; and if she was aware of our anxiety, or the cause for it, she gave no sign.

She must have been cruelly tired, for it should be remembered that she had been without sleep or rest after the hard exertions of the dance, to say nothing of the wearing strain and agitation of her subsequent adventures; yet there was no droop to her shoulders, no slightest let-down to the proud poise of her neck. The back of her head, which was all we could see, expressed more inflexible determination than many a man's set jaw.

Much as it galled me, I could not but admire the iron will which supported that

frail form, and enabled her to triumph over the fatigues and hardships she was called upon to endure.

It was broad daylight now, if such a watery, misty counterfeit as was offered to us could be called daylight, and I knew, from my own feelings, that breakfast would be most acceptable to the others.

Breakfast! And there was not even so much as a cracker on the launch.

There was, however, I discovered upon investigation, about a single glass of water, a little discolored and brackish, perhaps, but still drinkable.

I glanced at Ridgely, and as he nodded to my unspoken question, I filled a cup with it, and, making my way past the barrier, carried it back to our passenger.

She turned to me with a frown.

"I thought it was understood," she said icily, "that I was not to be annoyed except for some matter connected with the management of the boat, or to receive directions concerning my own movements."

And with that, before I could stop her, she emptied the water over the side and handed me back the cup.

The very wantonness of her act, the cool insult of her manner, left me without a word to say. Red and speechless, I beat an inglorious retreat to our own end of the boat, and there nursed my sore resentment.

"By Jove!" I fumed, "she ought to be made to understand her position. The idea of wasting that water, when every drop may be worth its weight in gold to us. The time may come when what she so heedlessly threw away would be the means of preserving the lives of all three of us."

I was going on to say a good deal more, but Ridgely cut in with sharp decision.

"Look here, colonel," he said, "you wouldn't have had a word of criticism if she had drunk the water; but it would have been gone, in that case, just the same. Your dudgeon, therefore, is not on account of the loss of the precious fluid, 'which might have been the means of preserving our lives,' but simply because you don't think you were treated with proper deference.

"Now, understand," he spoke low, but with considerable emphasis, "I am in command of this boat, and whatsoever Miss Davis chooses to do, so long as she is aboard, goes. I will not have it questioned or commented upon by even so much as the lifting of an eyelash.

"Further," he added, "if you inform her in any way, or even arouse her suspicions as to the peril we are in, I warn you now that I will throw you overboard."

I stole a covert glance at him, to see if he might not be joking; but evidently nothing was further from his thoughts. This was another case of meaning exactly what was said; and, berating Fate for having thrown me into the society of two such lunatics, I subsided into a sullen silence.

He was not a person, however, who could bear wounding anybody's feelings, and presently I could see the manifestations of a desire to "make up." Not that he was prepared at all to withdraw from the stand he had taken, but he was plainly regretful at having allowed himself to speak so sharply.

Dropping the moody and repellent pose he had worn, he made overtures to me in the way of certain comments upon our late experiences; and as I am one of the last persons in the world to cherish malice, and was, moreover, eager to learn just what construction he put upon Vincent's villainy, it was not long before we were in full swing over a friendly discussion of the affair.

According to his account, the first intimation which came to him that anything was wrong was after he had crossed the deck and was waiting at the head of the main hatchway for me to join him. There was no watchman about, and the coast was clear, he perceived, for the grand rush we had planned; so he lingered until I should come up, intending then to give our signal to Miss Davis.

While he waited, however, he was suddenly startled by the sound of a step ascending the companionway—the returning watchman, he instantly supposed—and, doubtful of gaining the side, or warning me in time to prevent detection, he crouched down in the shadow of the deck-house, with the idea of springing

upon the man from behind and, by shutting off his wind, forestall any attempt at outcry.

What was his surprise, though, a moment later, instead of the watchman, to see emerge from the hatchway a masked figure carrying a struggling woman in his arms, and with one hand pressed over her mouth to choke off her screams!

He admitted to me that, for the minute, he was so dazed and stupefied that he simply stared, unable to stir hand or foot. Then, as the top step of the stairway was reached, the woman, in her frantic endeavors, shook off the impeding hand, and gave one piercing shriek.

"That," he averred, "must have marked the climax of her resistance; for, ignorant as she is of what happened afterward, she must have swooned immediately upon voicing it."

If the scream was her cue to lose interest in the subsequent proceedings, however, it had a very different effect upon Ridgely.

Recognizing Miss Davis's voice, the paralysis of astonishment dropped from his limbs, and with a whirlwind bound he was upon the other man, striving to wrest the girl free.

"I would have succeeded, too," he declared a shade ruefully; "and probably none of this bothering aftermath would have happened, only I was taken off my feet by surprise a second time. In our struggle, the chap's mask slipped, and there I was facing no one but Vincent.

"Well, naturally, I let go my hold and staggered back a step—anybody would have done the same—and he was quick to take advantage of my involuntary movement.

"Out came his gun, and aiming point-blank at me, he fired. Oh, there was murder in his face, I tell you; he meant to finish me, there can be no doubt of that. But, possibly, the weight of the girl unsteadied him; possibly I dodged the flash. At any rate, he failed.

"I felt a hot, stinging sear across the side of my head, and, losing my balance, went down in a heap to the deck. It was like getting a partial knockout in a boxing-match, colonel. You know all that is happening around you, but you feel hazy and uncertain, and you don't

want to get up, although you know you ought to, and can hear the referee steadily counting you out.

"That was the way the lick took me, as nearly as I can describe it. I didn't care, somehow, what happened, and nothing seemed of any particular importance. And then I caught a glimpse of him climbing over the rail, and my brain cleared in a trice.

"What I was going to do, or how I was going to do it, I didn't know; but I understood that in some way I had to prevent his getting away with her.

"You mustn't think, though, that I deliberately pushed him into the water; that was outside my calculations. I simply saw, when I got to the rail, that she was in a launch, and he preparing to follow her; and I took the quickest way of getting to her side.

"It never struck me, you see, that the launch was mine, or that you could be aboard; for I had left you clear around on the other side of the yacht.

"And, by the way," interrupting himself, "how did you manage to be on hand so pat?"

Then, of course, I had to tell my story—all about the strange launch, and having mistaken Vincent for himself, when the former appeared with the girl at the rail, and all the rest of it. Naturally, I slurred over some points and embroidered others; but, on the whole, I guess I put up a pretty plausible narration.

At any rate, it satisfied him; for, when I had finished, he caught my hand in a cordial grip and told me he wanted to beg my pardon.

"Beg my pardon?" I asked. "What for?"

"Well," he flushed, "it sounds ridiculous, of course, and I can't blame you if you get offended; but your actions last night struck me as so peculiar that I've been troubled with more or less doubts ever since. Forgive me, old man, but I've been wondering whether it might not be possible that you and Vincent were in cahoots. Crazy idea, wasn't it?"

I agreed somewhat faintly that it was, and accepted his apologies with the best grace possible; but I was not entirely easy in my own mind over the incident.

If he got to prospecting too deeply in this field of speculation, he was certain, sooner or later, to strike pay gravel; for, with suspicion once aroused, only the most obtuse intellect could accept as coincidence or chance all the different clues which led from my trail to Vincent's.

And since, for various reasons, I was not yet ready for him to learn the true state of affairs, it became a very vital matter with me to head off further inquiries of the sort.

Musing upon what to do, I presently arose and began to pace up and down the restricted space allotted to us on the launch—from the wheel to the dividing line amidships, and back again.

The third time I approached the barrier I was startled out of my reverie by a silvery-toned appeal from the stern.

"Colonel Sullivan, will you come here a moment?"

It was so gracious and friendly that I could scarcely believe my ears; but, managing to master my first incredulity, I obeyed the behest.

She scrutinized me from under level brows for a full minute before she spoke; then she asked:

"Colonel Sullivan, is the story that Mr. La Pont just told of last night's occurrences true, or was it merely trumped up for my benefit?"

I comprehended now the reason for my summons. While Ridgely was talking, he must unconsciously have raised his voice in describing the details of his encounter on the yacht, and thus have presented his defense to her in the most convincing fashion.

I had thought vaguely, at the time—for I had been sitting looking toward her—that her back somehow seemed more interested, although, since she never glanced around, or even changed her position, it had never struck me that she was listening to what was said.

Now, it was evident, though, that she had been eagerly drinking in every word.

"Is it true?" she repeated, searching my face as though she would read my very soul.

She had not treated me altogether with consideration, and I thought it no more than just that she should take a little turn on the grill.

"How can I tell?" I teased her, therefore. "I have only his word for what happened on the deck, the same as yourself."

"Oh, but you know," she cried impatiently. "You saw all the other incidents which took place while I was unconscious, and which corroborate and confirm all that he says. Tell me, is it a true account?"

Her face, with lips slightly parted, was upraised to mine, her fingers were lacing and interlacing in her lap. I saw that she was already convinced, and only asked assurance from me as a sop to her pride, rather than for any added proof it would give.

In short, she was ready to confess herself in the wrong, and extend the olive-branch; and I knew pretty well what that would lead to with two people so manifestly made for each other.

Aren't we all matchmakers at heart? Don't we all want to smooth the path for a pair of estranged lovers? I know it was impossible for me to delay another moment in bringing about the happy reconciliation.

"True, Miss Davis!" I cried, and in the glow of beneficence I felt, I probably expanded my lungs. "True! It is as true as that we are at this moment drifting out into the middle of the Atlantic!"

The simile—the first which occurred to my mind—was a good one, but unfortunate. I have a confused vision of seeing her sink down in a half-swoon—of relief, I suppose—then a vivid recollection of harsh hands being laid to my collar and trousers'-seat, while a wrathful voice thundered in my ear: "You blundering idiot! Now see what you have done!"

A moment I spread-eagled through the air; then, souse! I went down into the sea, and the waters closed over my head.

Ridgely had carried out his threat.

CHAPTER VIII.

TURNED FROM THE DOOR.

SPLUTTERING and gasping, I came up from my impromptu bath, and shook the water from my eyes.

I did not especially mind the wetting—

the indignity shown me I could forgive; but I was seized with an unreasonable terror lest I should lose sight of the launch.

Not that I dreamed Ridgely, angry though he was, would willingly desert me; but I knew that all his attention would be taken up with the fainting girl, and it might be that with helm untended, the boat caught in a possible chance current, would swing away from me.

In such a case my predicament might easily become a tragedy; for the fog still hung so thick over the sea that, separated by a dozen yards, the launch and I would be invisible to each other, and there would be just about as much chance of my finding her again as of catching an individual fly in the desert of Sahara.

Then, what a brilliant chance I would have of getting out of this scrape alive! Twenty miles out at sea, or fifty, maybe—for Heaven alone knew how far we had drifted—encumbered by my heavy clothes, all sense of direction cut off by the fog. If there was any hope for us I was not optimist enough to see it.

Consequently, as may be imagined, I lost no time in looking for the launch the moment my vision cleared, and, to my intense relief, she was still in sight.

Even at that short distance, though, she showed hazy and indistinct, and if the fog shut down closer she might disappear like a picture wiped off a slate.

I struck out vigorously, therefore, to reach her. One mighty lunge I gave—a forward stroke with my arms, a deep, backward kick with my legs.

And then I came up with stinging feet to an upright position, feeling and looking probably as foolish as anything could outside of a daffy house.

For I had struck bottom! Where we had supposed the water ran a good forty fathoms, it did not really reach to my waist. We were on the shallows, and land must be not more than a short wade away.

Forgetful of any resentment, I stood up in my streaming clothes, and gave the glad hail to my shipmates:

"Land! Land! Land!"

You never saw anything work such wonders as that simple cry.

Miss Davis revived as though by magic, and sat up.

Ridgely, who had been working over her, utterly oblivious to what became of me, straightened to his feet, and stared incredulously.

Then, when he saw me standing up out of the water, and waving my arms, he sprang impulsively overboard himself, as though to test my discovery by personal demonstration.

Upon him the water did not come to his knees, an evidence of such rapid shoaling that we both recognized the shore must lie in that direction, and almost at hand.

Hastily I floundered through the water to his side and, pushing the launch between us, we propelled it forward, shouting and hurrahing like a couple of boys let out of school.

We had taken hardly a dozen steps, though, before it grounded on the sand, and, quickly gathering Miss Davis up in his arms, Ridgely ran through the few remaining yards of surf, and set her down on her feet upon a little strip of beach. We were once more on good old *terra firma*.

For a moment none of us spoke; then Miss Davis, bowing her head into her hands, breathed a soft, "Thank God!"

"Thank God, indeed!" echoed Ridgely fervently.

I didn't indulge in any audible expressions of gratitude; but you can bet at that I didn't have any minority report to offer.

Indeed, probably the only reason I didn't join in the general chorus was because I was wondering whether that prayer of mine could possibly have had anything to do with the result.

The Bible tells, you remember, how the simple petition of the publican ran rings around all the swelling palaver of the self-righteous Pharisee; and it may be that a plea like mine, voiced in humbleness and sincerity of heart, scored a bull's-eye, where the invocation of a raft of experts would have scattered all over the lot.

I judge, too, although I can't say for certain, that being a publican in those days was not very different from my old line of business; and if a thing could happen once, there is no reason why it should not go through a second time.

Anyway, without taking too much

credit to myself, our salvation was little short of a miracle, look at it as you will.

For three people to drift out to sea in a dismantled launch for ten hours through night and fog, and right across the lanes of ocean traffic, and then come safe to shore, not one of them the worse for his experience, is a stroke that one comes pretty near having to charge up to Divine Providence.

Thankful as we felt, though, we could not stand there forever, chanting the long meter doxology. Material needs were pressing.

Ridgely and I were drenched to the skin, Miss Davis was undoubtedly suffering from the long exposure, none of us had had anything to eat since the unsubstantial supper served at the hop, and it was now almost four o'clock of the next afternoon.

It was plainly up to us to explore this refuge upon which we had stranded, and see what it offered in the way of food and shelter, to say nothing of means of communication with Nawadaha.

The fog lay too heavy all about to permit any survey of our surroundings, with a view to telling where we were; but after we had crossed the fringe of beach, and scrambled up a shelving bluff, we came to a wind-blown old orchard, with a path winding through it, which struck me all at once as being strangely familiar.

I gave a start; then, saying nothing to my companions, circled out from the path until I hit upon an ancient apple-tree.

Eagerly I scanned its gnarled and weather-beaten old trunk, and found, as I had expected, deep-cut in the bark just above the first fork, and showing still, despite the lapse of years, the initials, "H. W."

There was no longer any question in my mind. I knew where I was all right; and of all the strange coincidences of our adventure, this to me was one of the strangest.

To think that I should have been carried thus unwittingly to the one spot on earth which I would rather have cut off my right hand than visit!

Yes; I well knew where I was. This was the estate of Aunt Priscilla Winstock, my father's only sister, and a grim

old spinster, who had long ago consigned me and all my works to everlasting perdition.

I had spent one summer here as a boy, and the ordeal lay as a blighting memory in my youthful recollections. Every natural and boyish impulse had been sternly repressed, every slightest fault ruthlessly dragged to the light. She had insisted that I conform to her own austere mode of life in every respect.

The cutting of those very initials I had just been examining had cost me a flogging so brutal that it brought the blood.

In fact, she hated me for the liveliness and gaiety of my disposition, as the dark-browed old Puritan fathers hated the light-hearted roisterers who danced about the May-pole.

She always prophesied a bad end for me, and when I finally came that unfortunate cropper in Paris she took a malicious satisfaction in bearing the news to my mother—told it without a qualm to a delicate, bedridden invalid, who otherwise would have been kept in ignorance, and thereby, I verily believe, caused my mother's death as certainly as though she had plunged a dagger to that loving heart.

When I heard of it, had I been free, I don't think anything could have kept me from wreaking swift vengeance upon the merciless old woman: and even thus long afterward I had felt that I could not trust myself should I chance to meet her.

Yet here destiny, by some caprice, had cast me up at her very doors; and, as I well knew, there was no possibility of getting away without holding speech with her.

This domain of Aunt Priscilla's was an island about forty miles from New York, and upon it she lived, with only an aged maid of the same narrow stripe as herself for company.

Being a confirmed man-hater, the hands who tilled her fields were brought over from the mainland each morning, and sent back each evening, none of their sex being allowed to remain on the island a moment longer than was absolutely necessary; and I could see now, from such signs as locked barns and closed tool-houses, that they had already depart-

ed for the night, or else had not come over that day at all on account of the fog.

In either case their absence ended any hope of our leaving the island just now; for the boat which had borne them away, and which would not return before morning, was the sole means of communication with the outside world.

In our destitute condition, therefore, the only recourse left us was to crave her hospitality; for by this time Miss Davis, the first stimulating effects of our rescue having worn off, was almost in a state of collapse, and Ridgely and I were but little better off.

A miserable looking trio we were, indeed, as we straggled wearily up through the orchard and across a wide meadow, which lay between us and the house.

Miss Davis, having discarded as too heavy to carry the rugs of the launch in which she had wrapped herself while on board, now staggered along in her dilapidated ball gown, its chiffons wilted with the dampness, its laces torn and bedraggled. Her hair was streaked across her face, and coated with salt from the spray; her dainty slippers were little more than mud-stained pulp.

What Ridgely and I looked like in our soaked dress-suits and pumps, with our crumpled shirt-fronts, and our faces and hands smeared with grease from the refractory engine, may perhaps better be imagined than described.

I had not informed the others of my discovery—indeed, I could not well do so without disclosing to Ridgely the true identity of his friend, Colonel Herbert Sullivan; but if they had not been so utterly fagged they would surely have smelled a mouse, when we reached the yard-gate, and a vicious-looking mastiff came charging down toward us.

Big as a calf, showing his teeth, and uttering a deep, menacing bay, he looked like a formidable antagonist, and Ridgely half started to draw his revolver, but I stayed him; for I had recognized an old acquaintance, the one friend I had possessed upon the island in that long-ago youthful visit.

"Here, Cæsar!" I called. "Good dog!"

It was almost comical to see the change which came over the brute. He could

not have been more surprised if a brick-bat shied at him in hostility had suddenly been metamorphosed into a porterhouse steak.

He paused so abruptly in his onward rush that his big forepaws scraped along the ground; but still eying me uncertainly, and giving a doubtful growl, he waited until he had thrown his huge muzzle up and sniffed the air.

Then he winded me. The one sense which he knew could not betray him told him that here was his old playmate, and he needed no further assurance.

With a series of sharp, delighted yelps, he bounded up to me, leaping and fawning upon me, and trying to lick my face. But, although he accepted me, I soon found that I could not vouch with him for my companions.

Every time Ridgely or Miss Davis tried to pass the wicket he would leap back from me and, with the hair rising on his neck, vigorously oppose their entrance; and at last, in deference to his objections, I had to leave them outside, and go on alone to interview the mistress of the establishment.

In response to a vigorous rapping she finally appeared, carrying the double-barreled shotgun with which she always armed herself upon such occasions, and looking not a day older than when I had seen her last. Time has to confess itself powerless before such hardness as flint.

I presented myself, of course, in the guise of a complete stranger, and as I knew well enough how to skirt her prejudices, reeled off a story to account for our presence on the island which not only sounded more plausible than the true facts, but was also better fitted to meet her approval.

In fact, I flattered myself that I was making quite an impression, and felt sure that she was about to grant all I expected to ask, when that miserable dog had to queer the whole game.

When I came up to the house he remained behind to keep Ridgely and Miss Davis under due surveillance; but presently becoming satisfied that they meditated no intrusion he edged off, with many a backward glance, to continue the joyful reunion with me.

"Cæsar," cried Aunt Priscilla, seeing him advance, "go-back!" Then, as he

paid no heed, she warned me quickly: "Look out; he is dangerous!"

But the dog was already leaping up on me with playful springs, and bounding about me in transports of unmistakable affection.

Intensely puzzled, she leaned forward to watch.

"Strange," she ruminated. "He is usually very cross to strangers. I never knew him to act that way with but one person."

Then, as she scanned me narrowly, the quick light of suspicion in her eye became a gleam of certainty, and her thin lips came together with a snap.

"You are Herbert Winstock," she said, pointing a bony forefinger at me in accusation; and at that unfortunate moment, Miss Davis, evidently growing impatient, stood up and showed above the fence her bare neck and arms in the disheveled ball-dress, her touseled hair, her generally discreditable appearance.

Quick as a flash the strait-laced old tyrant brought her shotgun up to her shoulder.

"So," she cried scathingly, "you thought you could impose on me with your parcel of lies, did you? You and your friends look as though you had been 'returning from a prayer-meeting and broken down in the fog,' don't you? Returning from some low dance-hall or rowdy riot, more likely.

"Well, you can understand that I have no hospitality to offer either vagabonds or Jezebels. Neither bite nor sup shall such obtain from me, nor will I receive them under my decent roof. So take yourselves off the way you came, and don't any one of you dare approach this house again. I may not be able to rely upon my dog for protection, but I am not utterly without means of defense," and she significantly waved the gun. "I warn you now that upon provocation I shall not hesitate to use it."

Without giving me a chance to reply, she stepped inside and slammed the door in my face.

It was useless to attempt another appeal. I knew that iron resolution but too well.

Slowly I turned away to bear the dire news back to my companions.

Hungry, tired to the point of exhaus-

tion, insufficiently clothed, we were condemned by this inhuman woman to pass the night in the open.

And, to add to our discomfort, it now began to rain.

CHAPTER IX.

A TASTE OF HOBO LIFE.

THERE is a good deal of truth in that old gag about "Things are never so bad but what they might be worse."

The jumping-off place is really always at least one step ahead, and there is generally a way around, if you will only take the trouble to look for it.

So it was with us now. Apparently, our plight couldn't well have been more desperate; but necessity is the mother of invention, and that rain, seeming to add the cap-sheaf to our miseries, acted as a spur to my inventive powers.

"We shall simply have to take shelter in the big barn," I announced with a flash of inspiration.

"But I thought she told you that all the outbuildings were barred and padlocked like treasure-vaults?" interposed Ridgely; for in order to make the situation clear to my companions I had added some bits of my own knowledge to what my aunt actually said.

"So she did; but there are more than two ways to kill a cat, and I think, if my hand hasn't forgotten its old school-boy cunning, I can show her the futility of her precautions. Here, lend me your knife a minute, until I get a strand of barbed-wire loose from this fence. I think I'll be able to manufacture a pretty good substitute for a skeleton-key."

I did not think it necessary to add that the schoolboy knack of which I spoke had been later improved by a more professional experience; nor, for fear they might detect a certain workmanlike quality, did I let them witness my operations.

Protesting that for all of us to go would attract attention, I stole off alone; and in a few moments had the satisfaction of returning and informing them that the barn's rear door was open, and shelter assured.

Then, fastening my fingers firmly in

Cæsar's collar, so as to restrain him from flying at the others, I ushered our little party into the retreat I had provided, pointing in triumph to the stores of warm, soft hay waiting to serve us for couches.

Not a moment too soon did we gain our asylum, either; for hardly were we inside the door before the rain which had been born of the fog gave way in turn to a pelting storm.

"Well, escaping that is one piece of luck, anyway!" exclaimed Ridgely as he stood in the doorway, gazing out at the water descending in bucketfuls.

"One piece of luck?" I retorted. "I tell you, the luck has turned now; everything is coming our way. Bear a hand here, and help me get ready for supper;" for another brilliant idea had struck him.

"Supper!" Miss Davis looked up with a little moan from the pile of old sacks just within the entrance where she had flung herself, too weary to stir another step. "Don't mock me. Where are we going to get anything to eat here?"

"Watch me," I replied, and scouring out an old tin can with sand and rain-water, I stepped to the side of one of the sleek cows contentedly chewing their cuds at the other end of the building.

It was a long time since I had attempted to milk; but, as in the other instances, I found that where there is a will there is a way, and presently I was able to bear my impromptu beaker to Miss Davis, filled to the brim.

She drained it off almost at a gulp, and her eyes so earnestly begged for more that I returned with it again, and yet a third time, before I attempted to cater to my own craving.

At last, though, I got a chance for my innings; and had just started on my second warm, foaming cup, when she arose and came over to join me.

The taste of food she had obtained had worked wonders even in that short space of time. The drawn, haggard look was gone from her face, and there was a touch of color in her cheeks.

Her step, too, no longer dragged, and I noticed that she had twisted her hair afresh, and made some effort to repair her personal appearance.

I supposed at first that she had sought me out merely for the sake of company; for Ridgely was not with her at the moment, having set out to hunt for fresh eggs to serve as a second course to our repast. I was soon to discover, however, that she had a deeper purpose in view.

"Colonel Sullivan," she began a little hesitatingly, "I hope you won't think me unmaidenly, but there is a question I want to ask you. Does Ridgely love me?"

I was unprepared, so let her have it back as straight as she gave it.

"Yes, he does."

"Why doesn't he ask me to marry him, then?"

"Oh, he probably has some good reason for delay. Perhaps he wants to get his worldly affairs in shape. Or, on the other hand, he may fear an unfavorable answer."

"No," she shook her head, "I am convinced there is some more of Vincent's scheming back of it. Come; just between ourselves, is it not so?"

But I was reserving the story of Vincent's chicaneries for a different dénouement, and I answered guardedly:

"My dear Miss Eleanor, how can I say? I know Vincent La Pont only in the casual way."

"Faugh!" Her lip curled. "Why, you are on the inside of all his schemes. You are his secret-agent."

I was so startled that I dropped the can of milk I was holding.

"How do you know that?" I stammered. "Did he tell you?"

And then I could have bitten my tongue out for making so disastrous an admission.

"No," she smiled at my discomfiture; "but I know. I know some other things, too."

Thereupon she actually proceeded to outline the nature of the relations between myself and Vincent with such comprehensive accuracy that I could but gape at her in astonishment.

"But how did you learn all this?" I finally gasped. "You say you did not get it from him, and I am positive that I never told."

"Oh, that was easy," she replied. "It was simply by putting two and two together."

"Putting two and two together?"

"Yes. I had had my suspicions pretty well aroused already by thinking over the peculiar manner in which you dropped down unheralded at Nawadaha, and how you employed yourself after your arrival in so assiduously cultivating Ridgely; for as soon as I began to grasp something of the scope of Vincent's maneuvering I realized that he must have had a lieutenant on the ground to carry out his directions, and inform him of fresh developments.

"I was not fully certain in my own mind, though," she continued, "until we reached this island, and I got a glimpse of the lady you so euphoniously christened for our benefit as Mrs. Tackbiter.

"Perhaps you did not know, Colonel Sullivan"—and there was a hint of teasing malice in her glance—"that I am well enough acquainted with your Aunt Priscilla's appearance to recognize her when I see her."

"Eh?" I choked.

Was the creature a witch, I wondered, to possess such unerring perception?

"Yes; and having recognized her, it did not take me long to comprehend who you were. The friendliness of the dog, your evident familiarity with the place—much as you tried to conceal it—a dozen circumstances pointed to the one conclusion.

"Then I remembered the old intimacy between you and Vincent, and the fact that he was with you in Paris when—when—at that sad time; and my case was complete."

I did not speak for a moment or two after she had finished; I was too much cast down at this demolition of all the plans I had formed.

"Have you told Ridgely yet?" I asked at length.

"No."

"Then will you not let me tell him myself first? Perhaps I have not the right to ask such a favor; but—"

"I would not tell him, if I were you," she interrupted. "I certainly don't intend to, and there is really no reason why he should know."

I could only stare at her, and she smiled at my frank bewilderment.

"Ridgely could not understand as I do," she said, "that although associated

with his bitterest enemy in a plot to ruin him, you do not really mean him any harm. Is not that the truth, colonel?"

"Yes, it is; but how you ever guessed it, unless you are a mind-reader, passes my comprehension."

"I did not guess it; I *know*."

"Then, how do you know?"

"Oh, as to that I can only give you a woman's reason—because.

"But," she broke off, returning to her original inquiry, "you have not yet told me how Vincent has restrained Ridgely from making the avowal which I have so often seen trembling on his lips."

"And can't you divine that, too?" I bantered.

"Ah, no! I feel too deeply on that subject. Tell me what it is, colonel. Please."

"Why, simply that he has claimed to be engaged to you himself, and Ridgely is too game a sportsman to try to poach on another chap's preserves."

"Ah, I see!" She drew herself up, her brows level, her face settling into lines of resolution.

At that moment Ridgely came up with a capful of eggs. With magnificent forethought, she took them from him and set them safely on one side. Then she turned to him.

"Ridgely," she said, and her smile was beautiful as the dawn of a perfect summer day, "you thought I did you a terrible injustice last night; but it was as nothing to the injustice you have been showing me."

"Injustice to you, Eleanor?"

"Yes. What right had you to believe that I was in love with another man, when all the time you should have known that I— Oh, don't you understand?" she cried, her face a glorious blush, her eyelids tremulously falling "Will you force me to say it?"

Apparently he would not; for with arms outstretched he started toward her, and I discreetly retired to the other end of the barn.

Presently they called me back, however, and then we had as jolly a betrothal supper as you ever attended in your life. True, the menu was limited to raw eggs and milk; but we had hunger—that best of sauces—to season the repast.

Without, the rain and hail were streaming down, the lightning flashing, the thunder rolling, and the wind blowing great guns. But we three castaways—warm and dry and fed—paid no heed.

We drank toasts of milk to the happy pair, gave speeches, told stories, cracked jokes, and made merry with all our souls.

At last, however, the fun began to wane, and yawns to take the place of laughter, and with a common accord we broke up the banquet to seek our respective sleeping-places.

"Well," I said to myself as I stretched out comfortably upon my pile of hay, "off to the Land of Nod. Here is where I put in one good, full night at it for sure."

How little one can tell. At that moment there came a tremendous flash of lightning, like a flame of blinding blue, filling the whole universe, and immediately upon its heels a crashing roar, which seemed to split the world asunder!

CHAPTER X.

BY FIRE AND FLOOD.

My first idea was that the barn itself had been struck. In fact, I guess this was the idea of all three of us; for I found Ridgely in the darkness, clambering over and over a hay-rake in the dazed belief that he was ascending the ladder to the loft to rescue Eleanor, and Eleanor kept shrieking vigorously to demand why he wouldn't answer her, and whether or not he had been killed.

But when we gathered our scattered senses, and learned that we were all more frightened than hurt, we began to perceive that the devastating fluid must have passed us by.

By this time, however, I noticed an increase of illumination in the stable, a peculiar red glow, not intermittent, like the lightning flashes, but steady, and constantly growing brighter.

I stepped to a window to gaze out curiously in the direction whence it came, then started back in consternation.

"Good Heavens!" I exclaimed, "the house is on fire. It must have been that which was struck."

The others crowded about me to look, too; and then Eleanor recalled to us with

a thrill of horror that two old and helpless women had been in the burning structure.

"Could they have got out, do you suppose?" she cried.

We did not wait to speculate. An impulse to save awoke within each of us, and swept us pell-mell out of the barn and through the driving rain toward the house.

Once arrived at the front, and with nothing to impede our view, we could see plainly that the building was inevitably doomed. One end was blazing like a torch, and the whole lower floor was a seething mass of flames.

As yet, we had seen or heard nothing of either occupant; but at that moment the aged maid-servant, clad in an antediluvian wrapper, came running around the house with a cream-pitcher of water in her hand.

"I have been down to the milk-house to get buckets," she moaned; "but it is locked up, and Miss Priscilla has the keys, and this is all I could find."

It was too tragical and pathetic for any one to laugh.

Eleanor laid a hand on the old woman's shoulder and twisted her around.

"Where is Miss Priscilla?" she demanded.

"Oh, I don't know; but I guess she is inside. It was right over her room that the lightning struck, and she must be either dead or stunned. Now she'll be burned up!" And she finished with a burst of hysterical wailing.

A prompting of the soul was urging me toward the burning house. I knew just where my aunt's bedroom lay, and believed that I could reach it by means of an overhanging water-spout. It would be hazardous, of course; but still, until the fire burned farther, it could be done.

Each time, however, that the impulse seized me, the memory of that grievous wrong done me years ago rose up to hold me back.

Why, I asked myself, should I risk my life for a hateful old woman who was herself no better than a murderess? Was not Fate, in fact, meting out to her her just dues?

Again old Abigail broke out into her clamorous wails, and Ridgely, unable longer to bear the strain, gave an im-

patient exclamation and threw off his coat.

But Eleanor, seeing his purpose, threw her arms about his neck and strove with all her power to hold him back.

And while they struggled, I stood in sullen indecision. I could picture my mother's pale, beautiful face as it must have looked when the venomous tale was poured into her ears; and my heart grew hard and bitter within me.

And then, of a sudden, I heard her dear voice, just as plainly as though she had been standing at my side:

"Love your enemies, my son," it said. "Bless them that hate you and despitefully use you!"

I wavered no longer, but sprang forward to where Ridgely and Eleanor were contesting on the lawn.

"Here, stand back, *La Pont!*" I cried. "This is my job!"

Then up a pillar of the veranda I swarmed, over the smoldering shingles, and with a leap up caught the overhanging waterspout, to edge rapidly along it until I reached the desired window.

As I dropped inside, a door across the room gave way to the conflagration, and a great blast of smoke and flame rolled in to greet me.

But it only halted me for a second. Under it I ducked, and, groping my way to the bed, felt hastily over its surface.

For an instant I thought she was gone, and realized bitterly the hopelessness of attempting a further search. That was the moment I blamed myself most for the time I had wasted lingering upon the lawn.

Then my fingers touched a supine, huddled form, and a great wave of thanksgiving swept over me. Whether she was dead or alive, I could not tell; I only knew that her fate could not be charged to me.

Gathering her up in my arms, I rushed to the window, dropped her out to Ridgely, who was waiting below to receive her, and myself lost no time in following. Just as I reached the lawn the walls of the room I had just left fell in, and that whole end of the building collapsed, while a great pillar of flame and tossing sparks soared up to the heavens.

I turned from the destructive spec-

tacle, and asked old Abigail, who was bending over her mistress, and paying no attention to aught else, if Aunt Priscilla was dead.

"No, sir, she's a breathin' yet, all right; but she looks awful bad. There ain't no chance to git one, but it 'pears to me that she ought to have a doctor, if any one ever did."

It needed no practised eyes to discern that. She was unconscious, her breathing heavy and stertorous, her face dark with congestion.

I assisted Ridgely to carry her into the barn and make her as comfortable as possible; then, leaving her to Eleanor's ministrations, I returned to the servant.

"Is there no boat on the island?" I demanded, although I well knew what the answer would be.

"No, sir; Miss Priscilly wouldn't never have none."

"But certainly some one will put off from the mainland and come over to investigate the cause of this blaze?"

Again she shook her head.

"They has strict orders not to come over, no matter what they see. Besides, it's a pretty dirty night, sir, and they probably wouldn't take the trouble for what might be only a straw-rick."

"Then," said I, "there is only one thing left. I shall have to swim it."

Ridgely laid a protesting hand on me.

"Sullivan," he said, "you are joking!"

"Not at all. I shall take *Cæsar* with me, to help me out if I get in a tight place; but I have no fear. The dog and I have often done it before."

"At this place? I thought you were a stranger."

"Oh, I meant for as long a distance. At another place and with another dog, of course."

"But that was in daylight, and with clear weather. To try it now, in such a storm, with a dog you don't know, and over a course with which you are unfamiliar, is nothing short of suicidal."

But despite Ridgely's objections, I had my way, as one generally does if one starts out to get it. I had put my hand to the plow to save Aunt Priscilla's life, I told myself, and I wasn't going to draw back until I had done all that was humanly possible.

So, ten minutes or so later, stripped down to my drawers and undershirt, and with my hand on Cæsar's collar, I plunged in.

I am not going to describe that swim. What's the use? If I had not accomplished it I would not be writing this now; and the credit, if any there was, is poor old Cæsar's far more than mine.

Again and again I would have abandoned the struggle, and let myself sink while we were breasting those tossing rollers, if it hadn't been for the brave mastiff. He held me up, and gave me a chance to rest, when otherwise I must have succumbed.

What's the sense, therefore, of going into hysterics, as so many newspaper writers did at the time, over the fact that I was hauled out of the water unconscious by the life-savers, while the dog, the better and more courageous of us two, died from his exertions.

Perhaps, if they had rolled him on a barrel, and given him artificial respiration, he might have pulled through, too.

I delivered my message, and sent a doctor off to the island; and that is all there is to tell about it.

Then, wrapped up in blankets in the life-savers' cabin, I was just preparing to drift off deliciously into that sleep which had been denied me so long, when one of them came in with an evening paper and began to read an account of the dastardly robbery and abduction which had been perpetrated by Ridgely La Pont, and how the police had an excellent clue to his whereabouts, and were certain that his apprehension was only a matter of hours.

All this interested me, of course, but merely in a mild way, until the reader came to the end of the story, and added:

"General La Pont, the father of the wayward prodigal, is reported as prostrated by the disgrace, and his nephew, Vincent, who is in constant attendance upon him, admits that his death may happen at any moment."

I started up on one elbow, and excitedly begged for a suit of clothes and money enough to get me to New York.

They thought I was delirious at first, and tried to soothe me; then, when they found I knew what I was talking about, told me I was in no fit condition.

"But it means twenty thousand dollars to me," I declared.

Still they shook their heads and voiced their protests.

Then I got mad, and, leaping out of bed, took my stand.

"Look here," I said, "I'm going to New York. I'm going, if I have to wrap myself in a blanket and walk every foot of the way. It is up to me *to save an old man's life!*"

CHAPTER XI.

"PAID IN FULL."

WHEN I presented myself at General La Pont's residence, on Seventy-Second Street, the next morning, I anticipated some trouble in gaining admission; but, to my surprise, I was met at the door as though expected, and ushered right up to the sick room.

It was evident to me as soon as I got inside, though, that a mistake had been made; for Vincent, who was sitting at his uncle's bedside, sprang to his feet with a scowl and, striding across the floor, demanded to know what I wanted.

Just then the old general feebly opened his eyes.

"Is it the notary, Vincent?" he asked.

"No," replied the other, striving to push me out of the door.

"Who is it, then?" The general's tone rose querulously.

Vincent hesitated for a suitable lie, and I took advantage of the pause.

"It is I, general. Herbert Winstock. I heard that you were ill, and have come to see you."

He seemed pleased.

"Why, that is good of you, Herbert, especially as I said some pretty severe things of you at one time. And now my chickens have come home to roost." His voice broke. "However, no need to go into that. I am glad to see you, Herbert. Come and sit down beside me. It is a long while since you and I have met, my boy, and—"

"Uncle, do you think this wise?" interrupted Vincent with irritation. "Remember, you have some important business to transact this morning, and it might be better to conserve your strength for that."

"Pooh, Vincent! You would make a mollicoddle out of me. All I have to do is to sign that new will, and Herbert can stay and be a witness to it, if he wants to. Besides, I feel much stronger and better this morning. I really believe that new medicine is getting in its work.

"You must know, Herbert," turning to me, "that Vincent has got me a new doctor, and a wonderful new medicine, which we believe is going to work wonders. I shall have to admit, though, Vincent, that the pain about the heart still continues, and that those spasmodic twitchings—

"What is that?" he broke off sharply; for the street was being filled with the clamor of "Uxtray! Uxtray!"

Vincent stepped to the window and, after listening a moment, turned, hastily dropping his eyes to conceal their glow of exultation.

"It is nothing," he said, in a way to pique curiosity.

The old man raised up excitedly upon his pillows.

"Don't deceive me, Vincent. You are trying to hold something back from me. Let me know the whole truth. I can bear it."

"Well, then," with feigned dejection, "if you must know, they've got him."

"Got him!" The sick man was plucking nervously at the coverlid with his fingers. "My son is under arrest on the charge of a heinous crime! Oh, is there no possible chance that he may be innocent?"

"I am afraid not," with a mournful shake of the head. "The newsboys are calling that Miss Davis was found with him, almost in a state of collapse over the ordeal through which she had passed. That would seem to confirm his guilt absolutely."

The general sank back upon his couch, his face grown yellow in its pallor. Two big tears stole out from under his closed lids, and rolled down his cheeks.

Then he suddenly roused up, and shook his clenched fist.

"No, I will not give way to emotion," he cried. "He is not worthy of it. If I have felt a moment of weakness, a pang of pity for him, it is gone forever now. I utterly repudiate him and cast him from my heart."

There was a light tap at the door, and the notary entered.

"Yes," said the general, in response to a question from him. "I am ready. Let us get the will signed and done with at once. I shudder at each moment of delay, lest I may die, and that ingrate reap a benefit from it."

The formalities of the occasion were accordingly concluded quickly. The general, with unshaking hand, traced his signature across the foot of the document; and then, when the housekeeper and I had signed as witnesses, and the notary taken our several acknowledgments, it was all over.

As the lawyer withdrew I picked up the pen I had just used, and wrote across a piece of paper: "When do I get my money?" Vincent frowned when I held this up for his inspection; but, after considering a moment, thrust his hand into his pocket, and with no very good grace slipped me a thousand-dollar bill.

I simply picked up the pen again and wrote: "There are nineteen more coming to me. When do I get them?"

This time he almost threw a fit, waving his hands about excitedly, and trying to tell me with frantic motions of his lips that I would have to wait a bit, as he did not have anything like the amount I demanded on hand.

"Dig," I wrote calmly. "Time is up, and if I don't get my money there will be trouble."

So, albeit with the greatest unwillingness, the twenty thousand was at last paid over.

At the same moment he announced to his uncle that it was time to take another dose of medicine.

"Since it is doing you so much good," he said suavely, "I guess I will give you a double quantity this time."

He poured out the drug, a colorless liquid, into a measuring glass, and as he set down the bottle I deftly snatched it up, and thrust it into my pocket.

Then I quickly interposed myself between him and his patient, and struck the glass from the general's lips.

"Don't drink any more of that, general," I cried. "It is poison!"

"What do you mean?" Vincent turned upon me, his face livid with fury.

"You fool!" he hissed, under his

breath. "Haven't I settled in full with you?"

"Yes," I cried, "you have settled with me; and that, as you may recall the terms, ends our villainous compact. I am no longer in your employ, and am consequently free to say and do what I please."

Then, to the general's absolute stupefaction, I read the pedigree of his new-made heir as I alone knew it, and laid bare the whole extent of his villainy.

But by this time Vincent had recovered his brazen impudence, and met each of my accusations with a sneer.

"This is a fine story from a convicted blackmailer, forger, and thief, isn't it?" he scoffed. "No doubt you expect to be well paid for it by my cousin Ridgely. But where is your proof, Mr. Graduate of Devil's Island? Where is your proof?"

"Yes, where is your proof, Herbert?" supplemented the general.

Vincent grinned, but he had forgotten that I held a trump card in my hand.

I drew out the twenty thousand from my pocket, and threw it on the bed.

"There is my proof," I said. "Those are the wages paid me for my share in the dirty scheme; and that, by the way, is the very money which Vincent stole from the Waterwitch night before last, with the intention of fastening the crime upon Ridgely!"

CHAPTER -XII.

AN AMAZING TURN OF AFFAIRS.

I HAD expected the arch-plotter to recoil before my fierce blast of denunciation; but, instead, he broke into a laugh—not the brazen, defiant laugh of conscious guilt, but one of hearty gratification. He laughed and clapped his hands.

"I guess the money has been fairly won, uncle," he said, turning to the general, who, to my further amazement, had cast aside the greater part of his broken feebleness, and was sitting up in bed laughing as amusedly as the other at my utter bewilderment.

"This twenty thousand dollars, Herbert"—and he picked it up from the bed—"is rightfully yours. Strangely enough, on the very morning that you called first at my office, I had received a draft for

that amount from Miss Priscilla Winstock, with instructions to hunt you up, and if I found any inclination at all on your part to lead a better life, I was to pay it over into your hands. She said that she realized she had done you a grievous wrong many years ago, and desired in this way to make such amends as lay in her power.

"You told me that you had determined to turn over a new leaf; but I decided to prove your statement before accepting it. This was to be your reward, if you showed yourself impregnable to temptation, although you naturally took my offer in exactly the contrary sense; whereas, if you had kept the money on that score, you would have been arrested immediately on leaving this house, and forced to disgorge.

"Take the money. It is squarely yours; and I may tell you that I am all the more gratified at your triumph, from the fact that I was all the time firmly convinced you were heading just the other way."

I still held back, however. There were several things yet to be explained to me before I could credit Vincent La Pont with being on the square.

I put them to him *seriatim*, checking off the different accusations on my fingers; but in each case either the uncle or nephew showed me where I had let my suspicions lead me entirely astray.

The will I believed he had influenced the old man into signing was, I found, one made out in Ridgely's favor; the poison I thought he had administered was, he proved to me by drinking the entire bottle, nothing more than simple lime-water.

"Oh, I tell you, you were a wonderful help to me, Herbert," he laughed again. "You were constantly offering fresh suggestions toward my supposititious plot."

"Then, the whole thing was a test, eh?" I inquired, still not altogether satisfied; "a plan whereby to discover whether or not I was an honest man?"

"Not entirely that. We also had another object in view; for uncle desired to teach Ridgely a lesson as to the desperate straits into which the love of excitement and a predilection for bad company may unwittingly lead one. So, we

joined forces on the issue, and decided to kill two birds with one stone."

He would have gone on at greater length, but just then there came a sound of excited voices from the door, a tramping of feet upon the stairs, and a moment later Ridgely and Eleanor, escorted by no one less than old Potiphar Davis, swept into the room like a couple of graceful yachts convoyed by a stout and puffing tug.

Ridgely, taking the girl by the hand, led her proudly up to his father to receive a parental blessing, and the financier came forward to shake hands with me; but not one of the three did more than glance with hostile disdain in the direction of Vincent.

"I am here, general," announced Potiphar, wiping a perspiring brow. "I am here with the young people, as directed in your note; and, as you requested, I have suspended judgment, and delayed taking action until I saw you.

"But I warn you," and a vindictive gleam snapped into his eye, "there will have to be some very prompt and satisfactory explanation done. Robbery and attempted murder and abduction are not things to be lightly overlooked."

The general waved a hand toward Vincent, and the latter stepped forward, facing, unabashed, the battery of scornful and repellent eyes to repeat what I have already set down here as to the motive and purposes which had influenced him.

"As for the rest," he went on, "perhaps I can best explain what happened the night of the hop by giving my experiences in narrative form.

"I had already determined to steal a march upon the proposed piratical expedition, and take temporary charge myself of the cash on board the Waterwitch, for two reasons. The first was that I wanted to put Ridgely in as bad a plight as possible, in order to cure him of his thirst for such follies; the second, that I did not entirely trust Colonel Sullivan to retain the amateur character of the affair with such a haul in sight.

"Accordingly, as soon as the hop was over, a launch I had already engaged took me out to the yacht, and I went after the twenty thousand dollars.

"I had little fear of interference or

detection; for I knew the watch and crew would have been got out of the way in preparation for the later visitation, and I had told Miss Davis something which I was confident would keep her in her cabin."

Eleanor gave a start.

"You knew that I would not peep, then?" she broke in.

"I would have staked my life upon it. Consequently, when I turned at your cry, and saw you standing there behind me, I was struck all of a heap.

"I knew there was but one thing to do, though, for the success of my general plan, to get away, permitting you to believe for the time being that I was Ridgely, and I remembered having seen a cloak upon deck in which I believed you could be muffled long enough to let me drop into my launch and make off.

"I therefore seized you and hurried up the companionway, only to be utterly taken aback by a sudden and unexpected attack.

"I should have known that my masked assailant was Ridgely, of course; but I had not heard the signal he was to give, and in my confusion I only supposed it was some actual desperado who had learned of the booty aboard. I no more recognized him in his piratical get-up than if I had never set eyes on him before.

"Then, finding that he was getting the better of me in our tussle, I drew my revolver and fired; but my first thought being for Miss Davis's safety, and not knowing how many associates my late antagonist might have with him, it struck me that the best plan was to get her away from the yacht, and then raise an alarm throughout the flotilla.

"With this intention, I got to the side, lowered her into my launch as I supposed, and was about to follow, when I was thrust unceremoniously aside and dumped into the bay.

"As I went down, however, I recognized Colonel Sullivan's voice, and understood at last the error into which I had fallen. Therefore, I took no further action; but after swimming about a few minutes, had the good luck to be picked up by my launch, and came to shore."

As he finished, Ridgely and Eleanor

glanced at each other, and Potiphar Davis skeptically pursed up his lips.

"A very ingenious story," he began; "but—"

"But the absolute truth," broke in General La Pont with some emphasis. "I can vouch for it myself, for I knew all his plans in advance, and what took place was no more than their natural outcome. Another proof, Davis, is that you will find the twenty thousand dollars taken from you deposited to your credit in my bank by Vincent as soon as he got to town yesterday morning."

Ridgely, I could see, however, was still a shade doubtful.

"But look here, Vincent," he demanded resentfully, "if you were trying to be absolutely on the square, what made you tell all those lies to me and Eleanor about each other?"

"For your own good," retorted the schemer. "When two young people are dead in love with each other, and can't see it for themselves, drastic remedies have to be employed to open their eyes."

After that, there was nothing to do, of course, but to "make up" all around, and a season of general felicitation and interchange of experiences followed.

I learned that Aunt Priscilla was rapidly recovering from her shock, and wanted to see me as soon as I could come to the island. Also, that the "uxtray" which Vincent had pretended to hail as an announcement of Ridgely's arrest and disgrace was really a complete public

exoneration for him, and showed up the whole affair as merely a mammoth hoax.

Meanwhile, Ridgely and his father had been getting closer together than they had been for years, and were already interestedly laying plans for the fellow's entrance into business.

"And you aren't going to let any pining for excitement interfere, are you, my son?" fondly questioned the general.

"You bet he isn't," broke in Potiphar Davis. "If Eleanor makes anything the same kind of a wife that she is a daughter, he will have all the excitement he can attend to right at home."

Then the general called for the butler, and ordered him to bring up the best there was in the cellar.

"We must drink a toast to my new daughter," he said proudly.

"And to my new son," echoed Potiphar Davis.

"And we mustn't forget our real hero, Colonel Sullivan," cried Ridgely.

But I knew who the actual hero of the occasion was; for, despite his untroubled face and hearty congratulations, I knew a secret which none of the rest of them guessed.

More than one man has laid down his life for a friend, but to give up the woman you love to another— Ah, that is a pitch of self-sacrifice to which few of us can attain.

And that is just what had been done by the man I once thought to be the slimiest villain I had ever known.

THE END.

WINTER EVENING.

KEENER, crisper, grows the air, and stiller,
While the night her dusky doors unbars;
Shifting as a spectral spiral pillar,
One white smoke-shaft links the earth and stars.

In the woodland no melodious rally;
Presage of the springtime?—not a breath!
On the hill and in the sheeted valley
Silence as inexorable as death.

Yef' beneath this numbing coil and cumber,
Hearkening but the word to bid it start—
Leap to life from out its icy slumber—
Somewhere waits the living vernal heart.

Clinton Scollard.

ALL FOR PUBLICITY.

By GARRET SMITH.

What came of a thirst for printer's ink in connection with the speed limit for automobiles.

"I'M going to get myself arrested. It pays."

With this remarkable statement, Peter Cooley jumped up from the breakfast-table excitedly and thrust the morning paper under the nose of his astonished and somewhat alarmed wife.

"My dear! Are you crazy?" she exclaimed.

"I'm not in the least crazy. I've simply got the great idea at last. Read that. There's a man with a big business who probably can afford to spend hundreds of thousands on paid advertising. He's arrested by mistake for a pickpocket. The mistake is cleared up immediately, but it's learned who he is, and every paper in town gives him a quarter of a column or more of free reading matter. He'd have to pay five dollars a line for it otherwise. Now he can sue for false arrest if he's foxy and get some more free reading matter.

"Confound it! If these fellows can get free reading matter by accident when they don't need it, why can't I do it on purpose? Heaven knows I need it badly enough! Here's where I get ahead of De Silva and his quack remedies."

"But, dear," interrupted Mrs. Cooley, "how can you arrange a lucky accident like that? Or, on the other hand, if you really break the law, it won't increase public confidence in the great Cooley invigorator to know that its proprietor is in jail."

"Ah, that's where your husband is clever. It's an honor to be arrested for speeding an automobile. It attracts attention and looks like prosperity. That's my scheme."

"But you haven't an automobile."

"I'll hire one for an hour for five dollars, a big touring-car. The public won't know but what I own it. Tonight I'll spend a few dollars on a small, single column ad in one paper with my

picture. I'll take a copy of that paper along to identify and give myself a puff with when I'm arrested. Then I'll hit it up the drive at forty miles an hour. Intelligent and vigilant cop does the rest."

"But can you run an automobile?" came anxiously from the unconvinced lady.

"Why, I've ridden for hours at a time in Tom Henderson's machine, and helped him run it. Of course I can."

"But your arrest won't be much of an item."

"I'll make it so. I'll put up an awful holler about it being an outrage, declare who I am, show my ad and picture to prove it, threaten suit for false arrest, and generally attract attention. Of course, I'll finally pay the little fine. Some of the yellow papers may even run my picture."

"But that won't go far, my dear. The public soon forgets," again objected Mrs. Cooley.

"I know, but see what a start I get for about one-tenth what that amount of paid advertising would cost. Then, while the public's memory is fresh, I'll put the rest of my little pile in some street-car advertising. They'll read about my being arrested in my motor and look up to see my ad over their heads. Then I'll write allegedly friendly letters to all the druggists I met on my trip when introducing the invigorator and enclose a clipping to each. Each fellow will think he's out of the swim and order a case of invigorator. That'll give me money to continue the car ads."

II.

THE next afternoon saw Peter Cooley, proprietor of Cooley's great invigorator, driving a big touring-car down Eighty-Fifth Street toward Riverside

Drive. Mrs. Cooley had refused to accompany him, but wifely anxiety had led her to station herself at the wall near where the coup was to take place.

Indeed, it did look a little risky to Cooley in the light of the next day. But his was a desperate case.

He had given up a good position in one of New York's leading drug-stores the year before to promote this remedy for weak nerves, his own invention. He had spent half his savings in a tour of the principal Eastern cities, introducing the preparation to the drug trade, and most of the other half in advertising.

It hadn't been quite enough to put the thing on a paying basis. Meanwhile, his rival, De Silva, whose remedies Cooley knew were quack, had grown rich and owned a house on the drive near the street in which Cooley rented humble apartments.

He simply must catch up to De Silva. So Cooley shut his teeth hard as he turned into the drive and threw on the high speed.

But skill at mixing drugs and proficiency in driving a fast auto are two separate things. Instantly the medicine-man realized he had placed too much confidence in his instinctive ability as a chauffeur. As he swung round the corner at top speed he had an unpleasant conviction that the big red car was having its own sweet way about it.

A front wheel bunted the curb viciously. The motor seemed to rebound like a rubber ball. It didn't appear really intimate with the ground again till it struck the middle of the drive. There it skidded a rod sideways and reared on two wheels for a moment, like an alarmed bronco.

Next, with an independent sort of snort, it plunged for the wall, where stood the terrified Mrs. Cooley. Her husband had a fleeting glimpse of his dignified spouse clambering over the low barrier very much after the manner of a small boy caught stealing apples from an orchard.

But he gained control of the machine just in time to veer away. The mudguards scraped a tree as he shot back into the roadway. The opposite guards bowled over a nice white-haired bystander. Horrified, Cooley looked back

as he rounded a bend to see the old man rise again.

"Not killed, thank Heaven!" he breathed.

Then he had other things to think about.

The big car had made another sally at the wall, tipping over a hansom-cab on the way. He dodged back toward the apartment-house opposite. A horse attached to a waiting brougham bolted.

Oh, he was attracting notice, all right! The entire drive was according him its entire attention. The big car was making at least fifty miles an hour. Three bicycle policemen were in pursuit.

And this last sight was a welcome one to Cooley for other than advertising reasons. He sat bent over among a maze of levers, trying in vain to find something that would stop his flight.

Then there was a crash like the collapse of the Singer tower, and the light went out.

III.

COOLEY came to in the ambulance. Another much-bandaged person lay beside him.

"Only a little bruised," said the doctor at the hospital, after a thorough punching of Cooley's sore anatomy. "Keep him here overnight, and you can have him in court in the morning. The other chap has a broken leg."

So, in a feeble voice, Cooley gave the policeman his name and pedigree. He also mentioned the great invigorator as impressively as possible. The ad he was going to spread before them, alas! had been lost in his mad flight.

But, despite his hurts and the impromptu method of carrying out the details of his plan, he had a comfortable feeling that he had wrought better than he knew. He had managed to make himself and his business known, and he had a glimpse of an eager newspaper man in the corridor taking notes on the case.

Certainly, he would figure in the news for several days. It would cost more than he had planned, but it would be worth it.

The next noon the patient had a call from his wife. They wouldn't admit her before.

"Never mind, dear, it might be a lot worse," she began consolingly as she sat down by his bed.

Cooley didn't want consoling.

"Worse!" he laughed. "I should say it might. It couldn't be better. You've got the paper with you? Let's see it."

He rose eagerly, and rested on one elbow.

"Wait, dear. Let me tell you," she parleyed. "Do you know this is costing a great deal? Now, don't get angry, but I've been very busy settling with people this morning. There's the old man you knocked down, the cab you half smashed, the runaway, and the two motors, both badly damaged. Then the doctor's bill of the poor fellow with the broken arm. It's taken every cent you had left."

"Yes! Yes! I know!" broke in Cooley impatiently. "I expected that. It's worth it. The notice I'll get is worth ten times that."

"But, dear, that isn't all. It cost a thousand dollars more than we had. Wait. Don't be angry. I had to go to Mr. Whitridge for help. He's a dear. He needs a man, and says he'll take you back to your old position in the main store and advance the thousand to be paid out of your salary."

"Nonsense! I'll have that thousand back in a week's time. It was mighty white of Whitridge, of course, and I'll pay him every cent of his money back, with interest."

"Now be sensible, dear," his wife persisted. "You'll be lucky, Mr. Whitridge says, if we can show you lost control of the machine and get off without a term in the workhouse or a big fine. The magistrate you appear before has sworn he'll make an awful example of the next speeding case. And the officer who arrested you says you were drunk. We've got some witnesses, though, to swear you lost control of the motor, and can get you off if you keep absolutely quiet; and don't let them get an inkling of the fact that you were trying to get arrested. Now, read this and see if I'm not right."

She handed him a copy of one of the sensational evening papers, which had just been issued.

MEDICINE MANUFACTURER

HURT BY MOTOR.

That was the big black line that met his gaze.

"Great!" he exulted, looking up triumphantly at his wife.

Then he read the next part of the head over twice, and the expression of his face changed. Mrs. Cooley laid a sympathetic hand on his throbbing forehead.

This is what he saw:

Ferdinand De Silva Hit By Drunken Man Racing in Riverside Drive.

It was some minutes before he could get himself to read on. Wise Mrs. Cooley said nothing. This was the opening paragraph of the account:

Ferdinand de Silva, a well-known patent-medicine manufacturer, was seriously injured early this afternoon when his automobile was hit in Riverside Drive by another machine driven by an apparently intoxicated man and demolished. Mr. De Silva, who recently purchased a magnificent home near Eighty-Fifth Street, will probably recover, though suffering from a broken leg and possible internal injuries. The driver of the other car was rendered unconscious, but came to in the hospital, where he talked incoherently and gave his name as Cooler or Cooper, living in Eighty-Fifth Street. Nothing more is known of his identity. He will be arraigned on charges of speeding, intoxication, and malicious mischief. The machine he was driving was a hired one.

The article then went on with the details of Cooley's wild run, but it didn't have a line to show who he was and misspelled his name all through.

"Well, dear, what shall we do about it?" asked his wife gently after a few minutes.

The proprietor of the great invigorator was silent for some time. At length he turned a very humble face to his compassionate wife.

"Thank Mr. Whitridge for his kindness, and say I'll be at work for him as soon as I can get out of this mess. I'll sign a ten-year contract with him, if he wants me to," he added.

WANTED BY UNCLE SAM.

By BERTRAM LEBHAR,

Author of "The Jailbird," "When a Man's Hungry," "The Isle of Mysteries," etc.

Certain thrilling experiences that befell two army men and a sailor after they had left the service and looked forward to a peaceful civilian existence.

CHAPTER I.

THREE OF A KIND.

AS the big Western Express drew into the Grand Central Station two young men sprang jauntily from the smoking-car and joined the throng of passengers hurrying toward the gates at the end of the long platform.

The faces of both young men were bronzed to an extent which told of much exposure to a tropical sun, and each walked with a long, even stride, keeping step with the other with military precision; but these were the only points of resemblance between them.

In other characteristics they were as opposite as could be imagined. One, the younger, was tall, spare, and wiry; the other was short and stockily built, with muscles so massive that their outlines were plainly discernible through his clothes.

The face of the tall man wore a continuous grin, and there was a perpetual twinkle in his merry blue eyes. His companion's visage, on the contrary, was serious to the degree of gloominess. He looked like a man who rarely permitted himself to smile.

As the passengers from the express passed through the gates the majority of them were welcomed effusively by relatives or friends who had been waiting patiently for the arrival of the train.

But nobody came forward to greet our two young men. They passed through the crowds on the concourse unnoticed by a single soul.

Observing which, he of the gloomy countenance turned to his companion and remarked: "I wish we had somebody waiting here to give us the glad hand, Frank. It makes me sick to see these other fellows being hugged and kissed and patted on the back, and not a single

greeting for us. I'm beginning to feel sorry that I allowed you to persuade me to come here. We'd have been much better off if we'd stopped in Frisco. There, at least, we had plenty of friends, and here we don't know a blessed soul. Somehow or other I feel that this New York is going to be as cold as an icicle. I'm mighty sorry we're here."

"Nonsense," retorted the other cheerily. "Don't talk like an ass, Al. There's only one New York, and it's the greatest city in the world. Wait until you've seen it, and you'll change your mind about regretting you didn't camp in Frisco. Wait until you've seen the lights and the theaters and the crowds and the lobster palaces and the big hotels and—and the thousand and one other things which you can't duplicate in any other city. Why, man, it gives me a thrill even to think about them.

"And, besides, don't forget that we've come here to make our fortunes. There isn't another place on the face of the globe where money can be made as quickly and as easily as on good old Manhattan Isle.

"We've slept under canvas and lived on canned rations for the best part of six years, and now we're going to eat of the fat of the land and sleep on brass bedsteads with silken trimmings. Doesn't that prospect appeal to you, Al?"

His companion sighed and shook his head.

"Sounds good to hear you say it, Frank," he retorted moodily. "But how do we know that things are going to happen as you say? It's true that fellows have come here and grown rich, but, on the other hand, I've heard of others who have come to this city and starved to death. I'm almost sorry that we got out of the army. I'd have reenlisted if it hadn't been for you; and

who knows that I shouldn't have been better off?"

"Bosh!" cried the other emphatically. "Fighting little black devils for Uncle Sam is pretty good fun, but a fellow gets tired of it after a time. We've had six years of it, Al, and that's enough for any man. You and I were cut out for better things than soldiering. We've both had pretty good educations, and we're both young and healthy. Even the Philippine climate wasn't able to get the best of us, which proves that we're tough. There's no reason why we shouldn't succeed in this city. We're going to take the first good jobs that present themselves, and we're going to win out. Don't get cold feet at the start, old fellow."

As may be gathered from the above conversation both of these young men had seen active service in the United States army. In fact, they had just been honorably discharged, and had come direct from the Philippines, armed with a personal letter from their colonel informing anybody it might concern that both had been excellent soldiers, and were of sterling honesty and commendable character.

The colonel, in his letters, cheerfully recommended them to anybody who might be able to give them employment in civil life.

Frank Leffingwell, he of the tall, spare frame, was a New Englander. His parents had died when he was a child, and he was brought up by a rich maiden aunt who, at her death, had convincingly manifested her dislike for Frank by leaving all her money to organized charities and cutting him off without even the proverbial shilling.

Several hungry lawyers had urged the young man to contest the will in the courts, and assured him that he stood a good chance of winning out.

But Frank had shrugged his shoulders, and refused to engage in a legal fight. Instead, he had gone off and enlisted in an infantry regiment which was about to be sent to our Eastern possession.

Al Randolph had joined the regiment about the same time. He was a young man of good Southern family, had quarreled with his folks and come North, where, in a fit of pique, he had decided to don the uniform of a private.

The two soon became warm friends, and had been chums throughout their term of service. They grew to like army life so well that when their first enlistment was up they had been prevailed upon to sign again.

But after six years of campaigning Frank had grown tired of soldiering, and had persuaded his chum to give it up and come to New York. Hence their present appearance in the great metropolis.

As they stepped out of the waiting-room of the station, and gained the street, they were almost swept off their feet by the crowd of hurrying pedestrians on the sidewalk.

Arm in arm they strolled along, staring at everything they saw with eager eyes.

"Gee!" exclaimed Leffingwell enthusiastically. "Isn't this great, old fellow? Look at these crowds. Look at the carriages and the cabs and the trolley cars and the automobiles. Look at the tall buildings. If this doesn't beat the islands I'll eat my hat."

"Does look pretty good," assented Randolph somewhat grudgingly. "This must be the busiest street in the world, I guess."

"Not a bit of it," cried his companion excitedly. "Wait till we reach Broadway. There you'll see real life and bustle which will make this Forty-Second Street look like the main road of a country town. Here we are at Sixth Avenue. It hasn't changed much since I was here last. See that old elevated train rumbling over our heads. Isn't it fine? I tell you, a fellow has to spend six years in uncivilized parts in order to appreciate a big city."

"Hallo! What's going on? See all those people going into that building. And there's a band playing inside, too. Bet it's something good. Let's go in with them. We're out for a good time, and if it costs anything we've got the money to pay."

But they were not called upon to pay any admission fee. The crowds in question were pouring into Lycee Hall, where a public meeting was in progress.

The two eager young men followed the throng up a short flight of stairs to a roomy auditorium, where they found seats in the last row, and settled down to enjoy the proceedings.

At the front of the hall was a high platform, on which sat several shabby-looking men and women.

A tall, long-haired, wild-eyed man, attired in a long black frock coat somewhat the worse for wear, and plainly several sizes too small for him, was addressing the audience, punctuating his remarks with a series of wild gestures.

"My friends," he shouted, "the time for the overthrow of all governments is at hand. The people are tired of oppression, and eager for emancipation. The rich are steadily growing richer, and the poor are becoming poorer and more wretched every day. Is this state of affairs to continue any longer?"

"No, no!" shouted several wild-looking men in the audience. "Down with organized government!"

"This sounds to me pretty much like anarchy," whispered Randolph to his companion. "It's a wonder the police permit such talk."

"Pshaw! Talking doesn't do any harm. I guess the police know that these people are really quite harmless," replied Leffingwell. "That fellow on the stage is crazy. It's fun to listen to him."

"Are we going to permit ourselves to be trod underfoot any longer?" yelled the man on the platform. "Shall we continue to be slaves who lick the feet of our oppressors, or shall we rise in our might and throw off the yoke of the tyrants? This is for you to decide, my brothers and sisters. The time for action has arrived. Are you prepared to strike the blow for freedom?"

"We are! We are!" yelled the audience hoarsely.

There was a wild clapping of hands and stamping of feet. The band began to play the "Marseillaise." A man on the platform unfurled a big red flag and waved it wildly above his head.

"This is too much for me," growled Randolph, jumping to his feet. "I've fought for Old Glory, and I'll be hanged if I'm going to stand by and see that blasted red rag waved in my face."

"Sit down, you fool!" his companion whispered, pulling him forcibly into his seat. "I tell you, these people are all crazy. They don't realize how foolish they are. Let them rant. You'll get arrested if you make a disturbance."

"I deserve to get arrested if I don't make a disturbance," retorted the other angrily. "Come on, Frank, let's get out of here before I commit murder. This atmosphere sickens me."

"All right, we'll go," replied Leffingwell. "I'm pretty well disgusted myself, but I don't believe in starting a row. We don't want to get into trouble, you know. Come on; let's get out."

But just then the tumult ceased, and the frenzied speaker on the platform shouted something which caused both Leffingwell and his chum to jump angrily to their feet, their fists clenched and their eyes flashing fire.

"What is this government?" shouted the orator. "A government of tyranny. What is the army? A horde of drilled hoodlums organized to keep the common people in subjection."

"Did you hear that?" growled Randolph. "He says we're a horde of hoodlums. Didn't you hear him? Shall I go up on the platform and kill him?"

"What is our navy?" continued the speaker, waxing even more frantic. "Iron ships manned by uniformed cravens who—who—"

He did not finish the sentence. From one of the seats in the middle of the hall there suddenly arose a tall, rawboned man, whose distinguishing feature was a shock of vivid red hair.

"You're a blamed liar!" he shouted, in a voice so loud that it almost cracked the plaster on the high ceiling. "Get off that platform, you dirty blackguard, or I'll come up there and pound you to a jelly."

There were loud shouts of protest from men in the audience, and angry cries of "Put him out!"

"Put me out, eh?" shouted the red-haired disturber, suddenly seizing a heavy chair and waving it above his head as if it had been a three-pound Indian club. "I'm ready to lick each and every one of you. Come at me, you cowards, if you dare. I'll take the whole crowd of you together. I'm a sailor of the United States navy, and I'll show you whether I'm a uniformed craven. Come on, now—the more the merrier!"

"Come on," cried Leffingwell excitedly to his comrade. "That fellow has got the right idea. I was wrong. We'll

clean out this place if we have to spend the rest of our lives in prison."

Randolph needed no urging, and the two fought their way to the plucky sailor's side.

The few women in the audience and on the platform screamed shrilly. The men seized chairs and rushed savagely at the red-haired man and his allies. Those of the crowd who were not in sympathy with the meeting, and had merely come there out of curiosity, presently retreated to the street.

For ten minutes the battle raged furiously. Blow after blow was rained upon the dauntless three, but they gave more than they received, and their assailants went down like ninepins.

Somebody suddenly drew a knife and made a savage lunge at the heart of the red-headed sailor.

But ere the blow could land the chair which Randolph was waving above his head came down with a thud upon the head of the would-be murderer.

At the same moment another man drew an ugly looking knife and drove the blade into the muscle of Randolph's forearm.

A second later a wild-eyed looking man placed a forty-eight caliber revolver against Leffingwell's abdomen and mercilessly pulled the trigger.

Fortunately the gun missed fire, and before the ruffian could fire a second time the lanky Leffingwell had him by the throat and was choking the life out of him.

Suddenly somebody shouted: "The police! The police!" and a squad of uniformed patrolmen burst into the hall, swinging their night-sticks above their heads as they ran.

A sensible citizen on the street, hearing the noise of the fierce struggle raging inside, had telephoned to police headquarters, with the result that the reserves of the precinct station-house had been hurried to the scene.

In justice to the police, it is only fair to explain that this anarchist assemblage never would have been permitted in the first place, if it had not been for the fact that the projectors of the meeting had deceived the authorities by disguising the real object for which the gathering had been called together.

As Leffingwell caught sight of the brass-buttoned officers bursting through the door he released his hold on the throat of his half-strangled victim and whispered to Randolph: "Quick! We want to get out of this in a hurry. That window over there—savvy?"

Randolph glanced toward the window and nodded. Just as the mob turned its attention to the new enemy, and made desperate efforts to escape the deadly onslaught of the night-sticks, the two young men gained the window, which was open, and jumped to the ground beneath.

It was only a short jump, and both men landed on their feet. The window opened upon a narrow courtyard, at the rear of the hall, and the comrades, well drilled in the gentle art of scaling walls, made short work of climbing over a high iron fence which separated this yard from the street.

As they gained the sidewalk, Randolph tied a handkerchief tightly around his arm, which was bleeding profusely, and glanced at his companion with a grin.

"Pretty hot work, and a pretty narrow escape for us, eh?" he whispered. "Gee! Listen to the row they're making in there. Those cops aren't doing a thing to those darned anarchists. Serves them right, too, the dogs."

"Wonder what will happen to that red-haired sailor?" said Leffingwell. "He was a plucky chap. It'll be too bad if he gets arrested with that bunch."

But, just as the words were out of his mouth, he of the red hair suddenly made his appearance at the top of the fence, and a second later had landed beside them.

"Can't lose me, comrades," he chuckled. "I saw you making for that window, and thought that was pretty good tactics, so I followed you, and here I am. Hurt much?" he inquired, noticing the bloody handkerchief around Randolph's forearm.

"Not much. One of those curs managed to stick me—the coward! Those fellows fight meaner than Tagalogs."

"Ever fight them?" inquired the red-haired man curiously.

"I should say we have. My friend and I have just got our discharge papers from the army."

"Well, I'll be jaggered, if that ain't a funny coincidence!" cried the red-haired man. "I've just got mine from the navy. Queer that we should have met like this, isn't it? By the way, I might as well introduce myself properly. My name is Semple—Simon Semple, late of the United States cruiser Providence, and known to my friends as 'Simple Simon'."

"My name is Leffingwell, and this is Al Randolph. We'd better be moving along. If we stay here, we're likely to be caught by the police. Got any particular place to go, Semple?"

"No, I haven't," was the reply. "I've left the service and come to New York to have a good time and, incidentally, to make my fortune in civil life."

"Well, I'll be hanged!" cried Leffingwell enthusiastically. "That's exactly what we're here for. We're three of a kind, it seems. We'll have to stick together, Simple Simon."

CHAPTER II.

WHILE THE MONEY LASTS.

LEFFINGWELL'S proposition was eagerly accepted by the red-headed sailor.

"Stick together we will, my hearties," he exclaimed cordially, as they walked along, arm in arm. "I flatter myself I can tell a good fellow when I meet one, and you strike me as being a couple of tip-toppers. I haven't got a soul in the world who gives a hang for me, and I'll be mighty glad to travel in your company if you really care to have me."

"You seem to be gentlemen by birth and eddication, and I'm only a rough sailorman. I'm afraid for that reason you'll tire of my company before very long. However, we'll give it a trial, since you've been good enough to say the word. By the way, got any money?"

At this blunt question, Leffingwell and Randolph exchanged a glance of suspicion. The former began to repent of his hastiness in inviting their new-found friend to join them.

Simple Simon's next sentence, however, reassured him.

"The reason I ask," he explained, "is because I happen to have a little bundle myself."

He pulled a substantial-looking roll of bills from his trousers-pocket.

"There's pretty near a thousand dollars here," he said. "Suppose you wonder how I come by such a big sum, eh? Well, I didn't save it out of my pay in the navy, and I didn't steal it. The fact is, an old uncle of mine died out in Pennsylvania recently, and left me fifteen hundred dollars. Now, I'd like to suggest that if you fellows haven't got more than this, we pool our money all together in one lump and spend it as we need it."

"Got more than that?" gasped the surprised Leffingwell. "Why, man, dear, Al and I haven't got three hundred dollars between us. It wouldn't be fair to do as you suggest."

"It wouldn't, eh?" chuckled Simple Simon. "Well, that's just where our opinions differ. I thought you said we was going to be comrades. I don't believe in any half-way measures. If we're to stick together we've got to share alike. Otherwise I prefer to go my way alone."

"One of you fellers had better be treasurer, I guess, and take care of all the money. I'm many years older than either of you, but I'm so confoundedly simple that I'll be losing this wad, first thing I know, if I keep it in my pocket."

"Well, if you insist, I'll take it," said Leffingwell. "Al, here, has already given me his money to take care of. We'll lump it all in one bundle, if you want. It will make pretty near thirteen hundred dollars altogether—which is a pretty tidy sum. This is mighty generous of you, old man."

"Not a bit of it. As I said before, I don't believe in any half-way measures. We'll have a good time together until our money is all gone, and then we'll dope out the easiest way to earn some more. By the way," drawing a document from his coat-pocket, "you'll do me a favor if you'll take care of this, too. It's my discharge paper, and I wouldn't like to lose it."

Leffingwell took the paper and the roll of bills and placed them in a large leather wallet, which he deposited in his inside coat-pocket.

"And now, that matter being properly disposed of, what do you suggest we do next?" inquired Simple Simon.

"I don't know. We've only just arrived in New York, and we were thinking of celebrating the occasion by seeing the sights to-night," replied Leffingwell, with a boyish laugh.

"That sounds good to me," the ex-sailor assented. "And when we're through sightseeing, where do you propose to bunk?"

"Don't know yet. We haven't started to look for lodgings. Do you know any nice, clean place?"

"Sure! The Waldorf-Astory."

Leffingwell laughed.

"You must be joking, old man. Surely you know that the Waldorf is one of the swellest hotels in the city."

"What of that?" cried Simple Simon almost fiercely. "Haven't we got nearly thirteen hundred dollars to spend between us, and doesn't that give us the right to be swell while the money lasts? I've been on the seas nearly all my life, comrades, and I've visited pretty nearly every port in the world. I've seen pretty near everything worth seeing, but there's two things I've never done, and they've become my greatest ambitions.

"One of them is to ride in an automobile, and the other is to eat and sleep at the Waldorf-Astory. When that uncle of mine died and left me that fifteen hundred dollars, I sez to myself, 'Simple Simon, old boy, you're going to do them two things as soon as you get your honorable discharge from the navy.'

"Therefore, I hope you'll humor me, comrades. From to-night on, we'll eat our fill of Waldorf food and sleep in Waldorf beds, while the money lasts, and we'll hire the biggest and brightest red automobiles we can find and try to eat up the speed records."

"But these luxuries will cost a lot of money," protested Randolph gravely. "Thirteen hundred dollars won't go very far if we hit it up at that rate. First thing you know, we shall all go broke. We ought to practise strict economy until we land jobs of some sort. We must look out for the future, you know."

Simple Simon sniffed disdainfully at the sage counsel.

"I guess the future can look out for itself," he retorted. "I'm a firm believer in fate, comrades. If we're going to be rich we're going to be rich, and if

we're going to be poor we're going to be poor. That's all there is to it. A few dollars more or less ain't going to help us. If we're fated to go broke, it might as well happen a few days sooner as a few days later. What do you say, mess-mate?"

He turned inquiringly to Leffingwell, the look on his face indicating that he expected the lanky member of the trio to indorse this unsound doctrine.

But the latter smiled and shook his head disapprovingly.

"I'm inclined to be careful of our money," he said. "New York is a mighty cruel town to go broke in, and even a few dollars may save us from starvation while we're hunting jobs."

"Then you don't think we ought to live at the Waldorf and ride around in red automobiles, eh?" exclaimed Simple Simon with an air of great disappointment.

"Honest, old chap, I think it would be wiser for us to find a cheaper lodging-place until we've made our fortunes," Leffingwell assured him.

"Well, why not compromise?" was Simon's next suggestion. "Let us eat and sleep at the Waldorf-Astory for this one night only. I'm willing to give up the red automobile, for the time being, and to-morrow, if you like, we'll look up a cheap place to bunk, and start in to economize for fair. I don't care if I sleep in a cheap sailor's lodging-house for the rest of my days if only I can have the satisfaction of spending one single night in that there swell hotel."

His eagerness was so appealing that his two chums acquiesced in this proposition. After all, they could not lose sight of the fact that by far the major portion of their joint treasury had been contributed by him. It was only just and fair that his preferences, however unwise, should receive some consideration.

Simple Simon was as delighted as a child at this decision. So eager was he to lay his red head on a Waldorf pillow that, although it was early evening, he was in favor of proceeding at once to the hotel.

But his two comrades urged that it would be much more fun to tramp around town for a few hours and take in all the sights before turning in.

"Perhaps you're right," he assented. "Marching around will help us to work up a proper appetite for that there swell meal. My, how my mouth waters at the thought of it! First of all, though," he added, turning to Randolph, "we'd better visit a doctor and have that there arm of yours attended to. By the way, I don't want you to think that I'm going to forget that you got that wound in saving my life. If it hadn't been for your quick action, I rather guess I'd have been a goner for sure. Some day I hope to be able to do as much for you, comrade."

"Forget it," retorted Randolph gruffly. "This little scratch doesn't amount to anything."

"Well, it seems to be bleeding quite some, and you've got to look out for blood-poisoning. It ain't any use taking chances with a knife-thrust," remarked Simon.

Leffingwell was of the same opinion, so, after walking some distance from the scene of their recent affray in order to avoid suspicion, they dropped into a Sixth Avenue drug-store.

This place was of a somewhat shady character, and a little thing like a knife-wound did not arouse any curiosity on the part of the proprietor.

The store was known in the Tenderloin as an establishment where one could purchase "dope" (morphin, cocain, etc.) in unlimited quantities, and where one could get a knife, razor, or gunshot wound treated and dressed without being asked any embarrassing questions.

Not knowing the character of the place, however, the three friends put their heads together and concocted a plausible and, of course, highly imaginative story to account for Randolph's wound before they dared to set foot inside the drug-store.

They were, therefore, greatly relieved by the matter-of-fact manner in which the proprietor regarded Randolph's bleeding forearm.

He skilfully washed and dressed the wound, and assured them that it was a mere scratch and would heal in a few days.

Then the happy trio started out to see the town in real earnest.

They visited all the moving-picture exhibitions on Sixth Avenue, and dropped

into garishly decorated cafés, where bad beer and worse whisky were consumed to the accompaniment of ragtime melodies banged out on pianos sadly out of tune by long-haired, dissipated-looking young men.

After they had had enough of these places, they sauntered into Broadway, where they were fascinated by the dazzling array of electric lights which has earned for that thoroughfare the sobriquet of "The Great White Way."

Here they mingled with the crowds of gaily dressed men and women, stared into the brilliantly lighted entrances of theaters, hotels, and "lobster palaces," and were thrilled by the ever-rushing stream of cabs, carriages, and automobiles.

The fact that they were jostled by the throngs on the sidewalks, and several times, when they undertook to cross the street, narrowly escaped being run down by fleeting cabs and automobiles, did not detract from their enjoyment.

The three comrades were in a seventh heaven of delight. Leffingwell's good-humored countenance wore a continuous grin of appreciation. Even Randolph's usually somber visage was illuminated by an occasional smile; while Simple Simon, who was by nature the most easily amused person on earth, was having the time of his life, as he himself expressed it, and chuckled immoderately at everything he heard and saw.

Finally, however, Simon's growing craving to taste of the fleshpots of the Waldorf and to sleep on a Waldorf bed induced him to declare that they had had enough of sightseeing and to suggest that they proceed forthwith to the hotel.

"Let's do the thing in style, boys, and go there in a cab," he proposed. "I guess them hotel people will think we're Carnegie, Rockefeller, and Morgan when they see us drive up in one of them stylish hansoms."

But, finding that the hotel was within easy walking distance, his companions vetoed this plan on the ground of economy.

It was just 11 P.M. when the trio arrived at the Waldorf. Simple Simon was much impressed by the exterior of the place; but when they had passed through the revolving storm-doors and entered

the brilliantly lighted building, the splendor of the interior quite took his breath away.

He stared at the magnificently gowned women and men they encountered in the lobbies as though they had been creatures of another planet.

And the said splendidly gowned women and men returned Simple Simon's stares with interest, for he was as much an object of curiosity to them as they were to him.

His two companions were unostentatiously dressed, and attracted no particular attention; but Simon was attired in a vivid green and brown check suit, and his necktie was of a bright red hue, while the resplendency of his appearance was heightened by a soft felt hat of steel-gray shade, to say nothing of the bright red hair with which nature had supplied him.

Although the clothing of the trio had been somewhat torn and ruffled during the desperate fight at Lycee Hall, they had afterward visited a tailor, who had made some quick repairs so skilfully that they were not visible to the naked eye of the casual observer.

Simple Simon had purchased his outfit with part of his legacy, and he was very proud of it.

He was thoroughly under the impression that the stares he was now attracting were looks of frank admiration, and his chest swelled visibly and he held his head high as he walked with his companions toward the desk of the room-clerk.

"We want to hire three adjoining bedrooms," said Leffingwell. "What is the price, please?"

The clerk made no reply. He was gazing at Simple Simon in speechless surprise.

"Don't you hear what my messmate is telling you?" cried that worthy impatiently. "We want to hire three rooms. Are you asleep or are you deaf, young feller?"

The dazed room-clerk found his tongue at length.

"Pardon me, but haven't you come to the wrong hotel?" he almost stammered.

"Wrong hotel? I should say not. This looks good enough for us," retorted Simple Simon.

The clerk held a whispered consulta-

tion with a stout little man in evening-clothes who looked intently at Simple Simon and shook his head emphatically.

"Pardon me," said the clerk again, "but have you brought any baggage?"

"No, we ain't," replied Simon. "We've got our tooth-brushes and razors in our pockets. What difference does that make, I should like to know?"

"We're perfectly willing to pay in advance," broke in Leffingwell, scenting where the trouble lay. "You see, we've only just arrived in New York, and for convenience' sake did not bring any baggage with us."

He put his hand to his coat-pocket with the intention of producing his wallet, and as he did so a spasm of alarm shot across his face and he uttered an exclamation of horrified surprise.

"What's the matter?" cried Simple Simon and Randolph in chorus.

His reply caused his two companions to become as agitated as himself.

"The money!" he gasped. "I've lost it—the wallet isn't in my pocket!"

CHAPTER III.

WORSE AND WORSE.

ON hearing Leffingwell's startling announcement, Simple Simon's face turned green, while Randolph regarded his chum with a scowl, half-incredulous, half-menacing.

"Lost the money!" gasped Simon. "Then we don't eat and sleep at the Waldorf-Astory, eh?"

"If this is a joke, it strikes me as being a mighty poor one," growled Randolph in Leffingwell's ear. "If you're fooling, hurry up and say so."

"I'm not fooling, Al," his chum assured him. "I'm telling the truth. The wallet is gone. Either I must have dropped it, or somebody must have picked my pocket while we were mingling with the crowds on Broadway."

"Which means that we are left stranded without a single cent among the three of us, eh?" snapped Randolph.

Leffingwell nodded sadly.

"I regret to say that's the situation, old fellow," he said. "I'm awfully sorry. Really I am. It was very careless of me."

"Careless of you? I should say it was," sneered Randolph. "Careless is not the word for it. A six-year-old child could give you points when it comes to intelligence. It almost serves us right, though, for trusting you to be treasurer, in the first place. We might have known what to expect."

"I can't imagine how the wallet could have got out of my pocket," declared the miserable Leffingwell.

"You can't, eh?" sneered his angry chum. "Well, now, isn't that strange? I guess it was taken out, Frank—taken out by a rude thief. Look in your pocket, and see if he didn't leave his visiting-card there, in place of the purse. Oh, you brainless idiot, you deserve a good thrashing for your criminal negligence, and I've half a mind to give it to you."

"Not in here," protested the room-clerk, who had been listening to this conversation with languid interest. "If you fellows have any scrapping to do, you'd better go outside and settle it."

"Besides," broke in Simple Simon, who by this time had regained his wonted composure, "what's the use of going on this way, comrade? If the money has gone, why, it's gone, and that's all there is to it. Our friend, here, didn't mean to lose it. It's an accident that might have happened to either one of us if we'd been taking care of the money instead of him. Let's forget all about it."

Leffingwell seized the sailor's hand gratefully.

"Simon," he said, "you're a trump. You have real cause to feel bad over our unfortunate loss, for you lose a thousand dollars, while Al and I had scarcely three hundred between us. Believe me, I appreciate your generous attitude."

"Well, when you get through expressing your appreciation, perhaps you'll be kind enough to inform us where we are going to sleep to-night," growled Randolph. "I guess we can't get rooms anywhere without money."

"Come outside, and let's talk matters over," suggested Simon. "It's no use losing our heads, young feller. Let's be calm and cool and collected, and hold a council of war. We'll find a way to get along, never fear."

Silently the trio walked out of the hotel where they had expected to spend the night in such luxury.

It must have been a sore disappointment to Simple Simon, who only a few minutes before had seen within his reach the realization of his great ambition to eat and sleep in the Waldorf. But not even a sigh escaped his lips as they passed through the revolving doors and gained the sidewalk.

The red-headed sailor may have been rough and unpolished in his manners, but he had a heart of gold. He realized how bad Leffingwell felt over the loss of the money, and he was anxious to spare him as much humiliation as possible.

"Well, now that we're outside, where are we to go next?" demanded Randolph fiercely. "I don't relish the idea of tramping the streets all night, I can tell you."

"And how are we going to obtain anything to eat? I'm getting mighty hungry, too. It strikes me we're in a pretty bad fix. Stranded in this wretched city, without a red cent to our names. Oh, what a fool I was ever to leave the army!"

"We must go out and look for jobs to-morrow morning, first thing," replied Simon. "Each of us will take the first job that offers itself. If we all succeed in getting work, well and good. But if all of us ain't successful, at least one of us ought to be lucky enough to land something, and, in that case, it will be up to him to support the other two until they manage to get on their feet."

"That sounds like a sensible suggestion," said Leffingwell. "Don't you think so, Al, old man? With those strong letters of recommendation the colonel gave us, and our honorable discharge papers, we ought to be able to find good positions. It's mighty lucky—"

He came to an abrupt stop, and beads of perspiration appeared upon his brow.

"Good Heavens!" he gasped. "This is terrible."

"What's the matter with you now?" demanded Randolph apprehensively.

"I forgot. Our discharge papers and those letters from the colonel are lost, too. They were in that wallet."

Upon hearing this, Randolph uttered

a howl of rage, and, had it not been for Simple Simon's hasty intervention, would have attacked his chum with his fists.

"Let me get at him!" he shouted, struggling desperately to break the sailor's restraining hold. "Let me hit him. The brainless loon deserves a thrashing, and he's going to get one. 'This is the last straw! It was bad enough to lose the money, but without those papers we won't even be able to get jobs. We couldn't be in worse straits."

"Oh, shut up," commanded Simple Simon impatiently. "Why don't you act sensible, comrade? What's done can't be undone.

"Take it easy, the same as I do. As I said before, our friend here didn't lose that wallet on purpose. The loss means just as much to him as it does to you or me. What's the sense in quarreling?"

Finally, Randolph cooled down to the extent of abandoning his intention of inflicting physical chastisement upon the long, lanky body of Leffingwell; but he continued to glare at the latter savagely.

"Of course, the loss of our papers complicates matters somewhat," continued Simon; "but there's no reason why at least one of us shouldn't be able to land work to-morrow, even without anything to show that we're honorably discharged from Uncle Sam's service.

"At the very worst, I ought to be able to get a job shoveling coal, or something of that sort. I guess a man doesn't have to furnish many references in order to get work as a coal-shoveler."

"Besides, if the worst comes to the worst, we can always reenlist," suggested Leffingwell.

"But, in the meantime, where are we going to spend this night, and how are we going to get anything to eat? I'm half-starved, and I'm getting mighty sleepy, and I don't feel like tramping the streets all night," declared the pessimistic Randolph.

"Oh, rats! You make me tired, young feller," retorted Simon disgustedly. "To hear the way you talk, no one would ever believe you'd roughed it as a soldier.

"Didn't you ever have to go without sleep and mess when you was in camp? Of course you did. Then, why the divvle are you making so much fuss

about it now? It's a nice clear night, and it won't hurt us any to tramp these here streets till morning. We must trust to luck. We may land something good first thing to-morrow. A feller never knows what fate has in store for him."

As they walked along, drifting aimlessly, Randolph's better nature gradually began to assert itself.

"Frank, old man," he said at length, turning suddenly toward Leffingwell and holding out his hand, "I'm mighty sorry I was so mean and ugly over the loss of that wallet. Don't feel so bad about it. Of course, it wasn't your fault, old boy, and—I guess we'll get along all right, anyway."

Leffingwell gripped his chum's hand in silent appreciation, and Simple Simon beamed upon the pair.

"That's the stuff!" he cried heartily. "Now you're talking like a man, and I'm proud of you. All the money in the world ain't worth breaking with a friend.

"Hallo! Who's this coming along? A young girl—and a nice young girl, too, if appearances count for anything. What can she be doing out alone at this hour of the night?"

They were walking through a quiet, deserted side street, and the object of his remark was young, quite pretty, and seemed to be a woman of refinement. Her face wore an expression of fear, as though she realized the dangers of being on the street at that hour without an escort.

As she passed them she glanced timidly into their faces, and, apparently reassured by their harmless appearance, stopped short, and said in a low voice:

"Oh, gentlemen, please protect me! A horrid man is following me. He is close behind me now. Please make him stop."

Simultaneously, the three men glanced up the street, and espied the figure of a man skulking in the background.

The trio started toward him, and as they drew near, saw that he was a short, thick-set, well-dressed individual of about middle age.

He made a bold attempt to pass them, evidently with the intention of continuing his pursuit of the girl; but the three men barred his path and forced him to halt.

"One minute, my friend," said Randolph quietly. "Don't be in such a hurry. We would like to have a little talk with you."

"What is it you want?" the other replied coolly. "Hurry up and say it. I haven't any time to lose."

"We would like to know, in the first place, why you are following that young lady," demanded Randolph.

"That is none of your business. Stand aside and let me pass, or I'll call the police."

"Oh, I guess you ain't likely to do that," said Simple Simon jeeringly. "Fellers who follow and annoy lone young women ain't overanxious to meet a policeman, I reckon. I guess the police ain't fond of mashers."

"I'm not a masher," protested the man angrily. "I have a good reason for following that young woman, and you are interfering in a matter you know nothing about. Stand aside and let me pass, or you will regret it."

"Whatever your reasons," interposed Randolph, "you've got to stop following the young lady. She has appealed to us for protection, and that's enough for us. If you are wise, my friend, you will turn around and walk off in the other direction."

"I shall do nothing of the kind. I am going right ahead, and you will stop me at your peril."

He made another attempt to push past them, and Randolph clenched his fists angrily.

"Take care," he said. "I was born in the South, and down there we have an effective way of dealing with mongrel curs who annoy women. Move another step forward and I will give you the worst thrashing you ever had."

"Since you are so chock full of chivalry, my fine Southerner," sneered the man, "you ought to realize that three against one is scarcely fair odds."

"Pooh!" retorted Randolph. "You and I are pretty evenly matched as to size and weight, and I give you my word of honor that my friends here will not interfere. Move aside, boys, and leave this fellow to me."

"Now, then," he added, turning to his adversary, "put up your fists and fight like a man."

"I don't want to fight," protested the other. "I want to go about my business, and you have no right to stop me."

He made another attempt to move forward in pursuit of the young woman. Randolph's fist shot out, and caught him squarely on the chin.

The man staggered backward, and his head struck the sidewalk with a crash.

He lay quite still where he had fallen. His eyes were closed, and his face deathly white.

Anxiously Randolph knelt down beside the prostrate body and put his ear to his victim's heart.

"Good Heaven, boys! I'm afraid I've killed him," he gasped.

At that moment two uniformed policemen ran up, rapping upon the sidewalk with their night-sticks for assistance as they came.

One of the upper windows of the house outside which this scene had been enacted was suddenly thrown open and an old man's head was thrust out.

"Officer," he cried, pointing to Randolph, "arrest that man kneeling down. It was he who did it. My wife and I saw him strike the poor gentleman, and we are willing to testify to his guilt."

CHAPTER IV.

IN BAD.

"RING for an ambulance, Bill," said one of the policemen to his partner. "There seems to be a spark of life here. A hurry call may save him. I can take care of these fellows while you're gone."

He placed the three friends in a row against an iron fence, and having searched them, to make sure they carried no weapons, he displayed a revolver of formidable caliber, and assured them in a voice that sounded as if it meant business that he would shoot the first one who tried any "monkey shines" with him.

"We won't try to run away, officer," said Randolph. "But surely there isn't any need to hold these other fellows. They have nothing to do with this affair. I frankly admit that I struck this man. I didn't mean to put so much force into the blow, and didn't have any intention of laying him out flat."

"Humph! Why did you hit him?"

"He insulted a young woman who appealed to me for protection."

"Where is this woman?"

"I don't know. She disappeared while we were arguing."

"A plausible story—I don't think," sneered the policeman. "My opinion is that you are three strong-armed guys, and that you held up this poor fellow for the purpose of robbing him."

"Then your opinion ain't worth a snap," declared Simple Simon indignantly. "We're respectable citizens. I'm late of the United States navy, and my messmates here are just discharged from the army. We ain't highway robbers."

"Huh! Got your discharge papers, I suppose, to prove you're what you say you are?"

"No, we ain't got them," replied Simon with a sigh. "Our comrade here was carrying them, and some sneaking son of a scorpion picked his pocket this very night."

The officer laughed incredulously.

"That doesn't sound very good to me," he said. "I'm afraid, my lads, you'll have a hard job getting away with a yarn of that sort when your case comes to trial. Reckon I'll have to lock up all three of you. I guess you all had a hand in this job, and it looks as if it's going to be murder. This poor fellow is either dead or dying, that's plain. Ha! here comes the ambulance now. We shall soon know."

With clanging gong the Red Cross wagon came dashing up, and the surgeon swung himself from the rear seat to kneel on the sidewalk beside the prostrate man.

"Not dead, but pretty near it," was his verdict. "Bad case of fractured skull. Must be rushed to the hospital at once."

"Is there a chance of saving his life, doctor?" inquired Randolph anxiously.

"Yes. There's a chance—but a very slim chance. It's a hundred to one that he'll die," was the discomfiting reply.

As the ambulance dashed off, the policeman, who had been joined by reinforcements, said gruffly: "Come on now, you fellows. The station-house for yours as quick as you can march."

The three men were locked up in adjoining cells. Although Randolph insisted that he alone had struck the wounded man, and the old gentleman and his wife who had witnessed the assault from their bedroom window came to the station-house and corroborated this statement, the sergeant decided to hold all three, charging them all with the assault.

This arrangement suited Simon and Leffingwell perfectly. They had no desire to escape scot-free while their friend was in trouble.

"We'll take our medicine together," yelled Simon to Randolph through the bars of his cell. "What happens to one shall happen to all of us. We're all equally guilty in this thing, and if they hang you or imprison you, comrade, they'll have to do the same with us."

Leffingwell also entertained this view, but Randolph pointed out that his friends could do him more good by securing their own liberty than they could by quixotically sharing his fate.

"While you fellows are on the inside of a cell, we are all helpless," he argued; "whereas, if you were free, you perhaps could do something to help me out of my scrape. For instance, we are absolutely penniless. Maybe if you fellows could get out and earn enough money to hire a good lawyer, it might help some. So, you see, you can accomplish a great deal more by putting this affair up to me alone than you could by trying to share the blame."

And, in the end, both Leffingwell and Simon had to admit the logic of this argument.

"I guess what you say is pretty near right," said Simon. "It doesn't seem exactly fair and square to desert a comrade in trouble, and it goes against the grain to do it; but, of course, you'll need outside help, as you say, and I guess it's up to us, if we get a chance, to crawl from under, so we can help you."

The next morning, in court, the magistrate examined the three comrades very carefully.

Randolph's victim was still alive, but the hospital authorities held out very little hope of his recovery. The police had searched his pockets, but had found

no papers which furnished any clue as to his identity.

"You say you struck this unknown man because he persisted in forcing his attentions upon a young woman, eh?" inquired the magistrate.

"Yes," said Randolph. "The young lady appealed to me on the street to protect her from a man who was following her. I got into an argument with the fellow, and struck him."

"And where is this young woman now? Is she in court as a witness?" inquired the magistrate.

"No, sir; she ran off while the argument was progressing. If you will let my friends here go free, maybe they will be able to find her and bring her to court in time for my trial."

"Humph! And what can you tell about this assault?" inquired the magistrate of the little old man and his wife who claimed to have seen the incident from their bedroom window.

"I don't know anything about any young woman appealing for help, judge," said the old man. "I didn't see any woman; neither did my wife, here. All I know about the case, your honor, is that my wife and I were awakened from our sleep by the sound of loud talking on the sidewalk beneath our window."

"We looked out just in time to see this young man strike the unfortunate gentleman and send him crashing to the sidewalk. Then we saw the same young fellow kneel down beside the body of his victim. Whether he took anything out of his pockets or not, I can't swear; but my opinion is that he did, and that his motive in striking the poor gentleman was highway robbery."

"Well," said the judge, "that's only your supposition, my friend. Tell me, officer, when you searched these young men in the station-house, did you find any valuables in their pockets which might have been taken from the man in the hospital?"

"No, your honor, I did not," replied the policeman who had made the arrest. "None of them had anything of value; although, of course, they might have robbed their victim and dropped the stuff when they saw they was up against it."

The magistrate deliberated for a few moments; then cleared his throat and said: "We'll hold the prisoner, Alfred Randolph, to await the injuries of the unknown man in the hospital. I presume the coroner has been notified. These two other young men may go. I discharge them, as there doesn't seem any evidence on which to hold them."

Simple Simon and Leffingwell thanked the court, and turned to their unfortunate comrade with considerable emotion.

"It makes me feel mighty mean to leave you this way, my boy," whispered Simon. "Seems as if we ought to stick it out by your side. However, I guess the wisest way is the best way. We'll get you out of this mess, never fear."

"You bet we will," echoed Leffingwell, clasping his chum's hand fervently. "Mighty sorry to have to leave you cooped up here, Al, old fellow; but, as you say, it's the only way. We're going to win your case for you, whether that fellow in the hospital lives or dies. I guess the first job for us to tackle is to find that girl."

CHAPTER V.

THE WORST LIAR IN THE REGIMENT.

As Leffingwell and Simple Simon stepped out on the sidewalk, they were accosted by a shabby little man who had followed them from the court-room.

"Pardon me, gents," he said in a confidential tone, "that friend of yours seems to be in a pretty bad fix. He'll go to the electric chair for sure if that fellow in the hospital dies."

Simple Simon glared at the man indignantly.

"Well, you're a nice, kind-hearted, cheerful sort of an individual, ain't you?" he growled. "Don't you reckon we feel bad enough without having to listen to such unpleasant talk as that? Nobody asked you for your opinion, anyway."

"Now, please don't get huffy," said the little man soothingly. "I didn't tell you that with the idea of making you feel bad. The fact is, I think I can help your friend out of his trouble."

"If you can," cried Leffingwell eager-

ly, "we'll be your friends for life. We'll never forget your kindness. Speak quick, old fellow, and tell us how you propose to do it."

The little man drew from his coat-pocket a leather case from which he extracted an engraved card.

"I happen to be well acquainted with a firm of lawyers," he said. "Kramer & Bernard is the name of the firm. Here is their card. They're the cleverest criminal lawyers in the country. I advise you to go to them and ask them to take up your friend's case. If anybody can save him, they can do it."

"They've never lost a case yet, and there are hundreds of lucky men in this city to-day who would be behind prison bars if it hadn't been for Kramer & Bernard. No matter how black the case may look against a client, Kramer & Bernard can pull him through all right. That is what I meant when I said I thought I knew a way to get your friend out of his trouble."

"And what's their price? I suppose they come pretty high, eh?" said Simon wistfully.

"Oh, no. You'll find them very reasonable, I think. You go and talk matters over with them. By the way, my name is Fletcher. You might mention that I recommended you to them. I'm a personal friend of both Mr. Kramer and Mr. Bernard, and if you mention my name they'll treat you right for my sake."

"Much obliged," said Leffingwell gratefully. "This is really very kind of you, sir."

"Pray don't mention it, I beg. I happened to be in court on some personal business when your friend's case was called, and there was something about his appearance which appealed to me and made me wish to help him. That is why I took the liberty of approaching you without the formality of an introduction."

As a matter of fact, of course, this little man was nothing more than a professional "runner" for a somewhat disreputable law firm. He made his living by accosting prisoners, or the friends of prisoners, in court and persuading them to retain his employers as counsel.

Leffingwell and Simple Simon were not

aware of this, however, and, swallowing all that the little man had said, they felt very grateful to him, and resolved to profit by his kind advice and pay an immediate visit to Messrs. Kramer & Bernard.

The office of the law firm was within easy walking distance, which fact they deemed mighty lucky, inasmuch as they possessed no car fare.

They had not tasted food for several hours, and the walk in the brisk air whetted their appetites; but they were too much worried over the plight of their unfortunate comrade to care about their own privations.

"I wouldn't mind if I never ate another meal," observed Leffingwell, "if only we could get Al out of his trouble. We've got to find that girl, Simple. Her testimony that she appealed to us to protect her from that fellow ought to clear Al, even if that chap in the hospital dies. Surely the law wouldn't punish a man for coming to the rescue of a young woman. We've got to find her and persuade her to come to court and testify."

"Oh, we'll find her, sure enough," declared Simon confidently. "You keep a stout heart, my boy, and don't lose hope. If these here lawyers we're going to are as smart as that feller says, they oughtn't to have much trouble in locating her."

"I suppose not. And yet we can't expect those lawyers to do much for us unless we pay them well; and here we haven't a red cent. If only I hadn't been careless enough to lose that wallet. Poor Al was right. I deserve a sound thrashing for my confounded negligence."

"Now, don't you be talking that way, messmate," cried Simon indignantly. "As I said before, it wasn't your fault at all. We'll get along somehow, never fear. And, as far as paying them lawyers is concerned, why, you and me'll get jobs and pay them on the instalment plan—give them so much each week out of our salary. I guess they'll be satisfied with that arrangement."

Suddenly Leffingwell uttered an exclamation of astonishment.

"Well, I'll be dashed! Here's a stroke of luck. Here's a chance to make fifty dollars."

"Fifty dollars—where?" cried Simple Simon eagerly.

"You see that drunken man staggering toward us. Get into this doorway quick, before he sees us, and I'll tell you all about it.

"I know that fellow. His name is Dick Mitchell, and he's a deserter from the United States army. Al and I served with him out in the Philippines. He was a member of our company, in fact. He deserted three years ago. I suppose they're still looking for him."

"Well, where does the fifty dollars come in?" inquired Simple Simon wonderingly. "I understood you to say just now that you had a chance to make fifty dollars."

"Of course we have. Surely you must know that Uncle Sam offers a reward of fifty dollars for the capture of every deserter. We'll seize this fellow, hand him over to the authorities, and claim the reward."

Simple Simon shook his head.

"I can't say I think much of that proposition, comrade," he said gravely. "Without meaning any offense to you, it sort of goes against my grain to turn informer."

"Well, you wouldn't say so if you knew this chap as Al and I know him," retorted Leffingwell, his face flushing at this reproach. "He's the meanest cuss that ever wore a uniform. Everybody in the regiment hated him, and there was scarcely a member of our company who would talk to him. He used to cheat at cards and—"

"Say no more," Simple Simon interrupted him. "That's enough for me. Any son of a scorpion who's mean-spirited enough to cheat at cards ain't deserving of any consideration. I'm with you on this capture proposition. That fifty dollars will come in mighty handy. Here he comes now. Let's grab him."

As the subject of their conversation staggered past the doorway in which they had concealed themselves, the two men rushed out and seized him.

"Hallo, Dick Mitchell!" cried Leffingwell grimly. "This is indeed an unexpected pleasure."

The drunken man looked at his captors out of startled eyes, and, as he recognized Leffingwell, the shock was so great that it sobered him.

He was a tall, slim young man, apparently of not more than thirty years of age. His long, black hair was parted in the middle, and he wore his hat at a rakish angle.

His face was clean-shaven and rather handsome, although it bore traces of dissipation.

He began to struggle desperately to free himself from the grasp of his captors; but physically he was no match for either of them, and they were able to retain their hold without difficulty.

Realizing that he was powerless in their hands, he soon ceased struggling and tried diplomacy.

"Let me go," he pleaded hoarsely. "You're making a mistake. My name is not Mitchell. You're taking me for somebody else."

Leffingwell laughed scornfully.

"Oh, I guess I'm not making any mistake. I'd know your villainous face anywhere. You're wanted for desertion from the United States army, and we're going to do our duty and hand you over to the authorities."

"Good Heavens! Please don't do that," their prisoner begged. "For the sake of old times, Leffingwell, be a good fellow and let me go. You and I were always good friends in the army."

"The deuce we were!" cried Leffingwell indignantly. "You're just as much of a liar as ever, Mitchell. You and I were never good friends. I never had any use for you, and well you know it. I always despised you for a cad and a coward. You were the meanest man that ever wore the uniform, and the army was well rid of you when you deserted."

"Then, why send me back?" cried Mitchell eagerly. "If it's the reward you're looking for, I'm willing to give you twice that amount to let me go."

"Not much," replied Leffingwell. "I don't mind admitting that we're dead broke, but we're not taking that kind of money, are we, Simple?"

"I should say 'not,'" declared Simon indignantly. "This impertinent shrimp deserves to have his face shoved in for daring to offer us a bribe. For two pins I'd do it, too. Come on, comrade. Let's hurry him to the nearest police station. We don't want to hear any more talk from him."

Nevertheless, Mitchell made one last appeal.

"Listen, Leffingwell," he said earnestly. "I'll admit that I was a pretty bad egg when I was in the army, but I've reformed since then—honestly, I have. I've got a good job in civil life. Nobody suspects that I'm a deserter, and I'm doing nicely. I'm engaged to be married to a nice little girl. The wedding is set for to-morrow, and it will break her heart if I am sent away. For her sake, I ask you to let me go."

Leffingwell and Simple Simon glanced at each other inquiringly. The deserter had chosen a line of argument which appealed to them strongly.

"Is that the truth?" inquired Simple Simon, closely scrutinizing the prisoner's face.

"If only I didn't know you to be such an awful liar, Mitchell," muttered Leffingwell hesitantly. "If I thought you were really telling the truth now, I think I'd be tempted to let you go free."

"I swear it's the truth I'm telling you," cried the deserter eagerly. "The whole truth, and nothing but the truth."

"You say you've got a good job. Where do you work?"

"I'm a traveling salesman for the linen firm of Howard & Co.," was the ready response.

"What's their address?"

"Market Street, Philadelphia."

"And you expect to get married to-morrow, eh?"

"Yes. All arrangements have been made for the wedding. Think of the suffering you'll cause if you hand me over to the authorities. For the sake of the girl, let me go."

"Humph! What do you say, Simple?" exclaimed Leffingwell, turning to his comrade. "Do you think this fellow is telling us the truth? Remember, he enjoys the reputation of being the worst liar in the regiment."

Simple Simon shook his head dubiously.

"I don't know what to say. If looks count for anything, he seems to be sincere enough; but, of course, appearances are very often deceptive. I'm inclined to give him the benefit of the doubt. Let's give him a good kick and send him about his business."

"All right," assented Leffingwell. "Knowing him of old as I do, I'm inclined to believe he's lying with his customary smoothness. If it's really true that he's going to get married—well, I pity the girl, that's all. However, we won't spoil her happiness. I'm willing to let him go—with the kick, as you suggest."

And a minute afterward Mitchell was darting away as fast as his legs could take him, his gait greatly accelerated by the impetus he derived from one of Leffingwell's heavily shod feet.

CHAPTER VI.

AN OPPORTUNITY LOST.

"THERE goes fifty dollars—easy money," declared Leffingwell half regretfully, as the fleeing deserter disappeared around a corner.

"Oh, well," responded Simon, with a good-humored shrug of the shoulders, "we can bear the loss of it. I guess we'll have other chances; and, after all, that kind of money ain't much to my liking, even in the case of a mean-souled cuss like him. It's too much like blood-money."

"If that fellow was telling us the truth, we've got the satisfaction of knowing that we've done a kind service to the young woman he's going to marry. I'd hate to have it on my conscience that we spoilt her romance by sending her lover to prison on the eve of the wedding."

"We'd probably have been doing her a much greater kindness if we had, and thereby prevented the marriage," responded Leffingwell. "It's a cinch that if she marries him she won't be happy for long. He's the kind of fellow who doesn't give a hang for anybody except himself."

"Here, for instance, we find him drunk as a boiled owl a day before his wedding. That shows how much he cares about the girl's feelings. You can bet it won't be long before she bitterly regrets her foolishness in marrying him."

"I suppose she's totally blind to his faults at present. Funny how a woman can fool herself where a man is concerned! The chances are, though, that he invented the whole story, and that I'm

wasting my sympathy on an imaginary young woman."

"Well, I guess we did right to give him the benefit of the doubt," commented Simon. "I ain't a bit sorry we let him go. And, after all," he added, with a chuckle, "that was a powerful strong kick you sent him on his way with."

Leffingwell smiled.

"I put my whole soul into it," he said. "I never felt so grateful to Heaven for supplying me with big feet. But let's be getting on our way to those lawyers."

When they arrived at the offices of Kramer & Bernard they were received by Mr. Max Kramer, the senior partner.

The latter was a little bald-headed man, with a very long nose and a pair of sharp black eyes.

He sat at a big roll-top desk, the pigeon-holes of which were crammed to overflowing with important-looking legal documents, and, having requested his visitors to be seated, he listened to their story with an air of wrapt attention.

"And you say your friend has already admitted in the magistrate's court that he struck the man, eh? That is bad, gentlemen—very bad. He should not have admitted anything until he consulted with us. His confession makes his case so much the more difficult to handle."

"But it wouldn't have done him any good to deny it," protested Leffingwell. "There were two witnesses besides ourselves who saw him strike the blow."

"That makes no difference," replied the lawyer sharply. "Maybe we could have found means of discrediting those witnesses. A man accused of a crime should never be willing to admit anything. Remember that, gentlemen, in case either of you get into trouble in future."

"If your friend had not confessed that he struck that blow his defense would have been easy. We should have been able to get him free without much trouble."

"But inasmuch as he was justified in hitting that chap, why shouldn't he admit it?" exclaimed Simple Simon. "That young woman asked him to protect her against the feller. I don't know much about the law, mister, and it ain't for me to tell you your business, but it seems to

me if you can help us find the young woman, and persuade her to go to court and testify for our friend, there won't be much doubt about his being allowed to go free."

The little lawyer regarded him with a superior smile.

"My dear sir," he said, "it isn't as easy as you apparently imagine. In the first place, it is going to be very hard to find that young woman. Remember, New York is an awfully big city. We can advertise for her in the personal columns of the newspapers, but the chances are that she won't see the advertisements or won't come forward."

"In the second place, even if we do manage to locate her, and get her testimony, we can't be sure that the jury will acquit your friend—especially if his victim dies, and he is placed on trial for murder."

"Not even when she testifies that she appealed to us to protect her from the man who was annoying her?" exclaimed Leffingwell in surprise.

"No, not even in that case," replied the lawyer. "It all depends upon who the girl is, and who this unidentified man in the hospital happens to be. Of course, if we could prove that he really was an ordinary street masher, and that the young woman was a woman of good character, with a good reason for being out on the streets unescorted at that hour of the night, your friend would stand a good chance of being acquitted."

"But I think you told me that when you asked the man why he was following the girl, he replied that he had good reasons for doing so. Maybe he spoke the truth. Maybe it will develop at the trial that the man was quite justified in what he did."

"Maybe she was wayward, and he was her father or a relative, keeping her in sight to see that she came to no harm. Maybe your friend butted into a situation in which he had no right whatever to interfere."

"If such turns out to be the case, and the prosecution brings out the facts in court, things will look pretty black for your friend. In all probability the jury's sympathies will be against him and with his victim."

At these chilling words Leffingwell

and Simple Simon glanced at each other despairingly.

"Then you don't think our comrade stands much chance of getting off?" gasped the former.

"He *must* be got off!" shouted Simple Simon, thumping his knee with his fist. "Darn it, Mr. Lawyer, you've got to get him free some way. I don't care how you manage it, but it's got to be done. The party who recommended us to you told us that you could win the most hopeless cases."

The lawyer bowed affably in acknowledgment of this compliment.

"I don't say that we can't do it," he said. "I feel confident that my partner and myself will be able to secure your friend's acquittal. But I want to impress upon you fully that it is going to be mighty hard work, and *it is going to cost a lot of money.*"

"A lot of money!" gasped Leffingwell and Simple Simon in a chorus of dismay.

"Yes. I can see right now that it is going to be a very expensive case. In the first place, the search for that young woman will be costly. The advertisements in the newspapers throughout the country will be quite expensive, and, in all probability, we shall have to hire several private detectives to look for her. Private detectives come high, you know."

"How much do you reckon it will cost?" inquired Simon gloomily.

"Well, in addition to the search for the girl, there are other things to be considered. For instance, it will be necessary for my partner and myself to devote a whole lot of time to the case, and to lawyers of our—er—prominence, as you can well imagine, time is extremely valuable."

Leffingwell sighed dismally.

"However," went on Mr. Kramer, dropping his voice to a confidential whisper, "I don't mind confessing that I have taken a great liking to you, gentlemen, and I feel deeply interested in the case of your unlucky friend. Therefore, I am willing to make our fee very reasonable."

"That's very kind of you, sir," cried Leffingwell gratefully. "How much will it come to?"

"Well, of course, we can't tell at the

present time what the total cost will be. That will depend upon how long the trial lasts, and how much work we have to put into it. One cannot form any estimate in advance, you know. But, of course, you will have to pay us a retaining fee."

"A retaining fee? And what may that be?" inquired Simple Simon wonderingly.

"A cash payment in advance. We never undertake a case without being paid something on account. As I have promised to be very easy with you, we will be satisfied in your case with a retaining fee of five hundred dollars."

Leffingwell stifled a groan, and Simple Simon's lower jaw dropped.

"Do you mean to say that you expect us to pay you five hundred dollars now, before you do a bloomin' thing on the case?" he gasped.

"Certainly. That's the custom. No lawyer will undertake a big case without a retaining fee. We've got to protect ourselves against possible loss, you know. I'm really letting you down very easy. We generally demand a thousand dollars in cases of this sort."

"Well, you might as well ask for a thousand as for five hundred, because we haven't got it to give you," sighed Leffingwell.

"Well, come now; don't look so despondent," said the little lawyer encouragingly. "I'm really anxious to help you; for, as I said before, you fellows have made a hit with me. I suppose my partner will scold, but I can't help it. In order to show my esteem for you I'm going to make a further reduction. You shall name your own terms, in fact. Now, how much are you prepared to give us, by way of a retainer?"

"We can't pay you anything at present," answered Leffingwell. "I don't mind confessing that we're dead broke. We haven't even the price of a breakfast."

"But if you will take this here case on credit, and get our messmate out of his trouble, I promise you that you sha'n't lose by it in the end," broke in Simple Simon eagerly. "We ain't got jobs as yet, but we expect to get work, and we'll work until we drop in order to pay you. Honor bright we will."

The lawyer shook his head, and the pleasant smile disappeared from his features.

"I'm afraid, gentlemen, that you've been wasting my time," he said severely. "We never undertake cases on such extraordinary terms. I was under the impression that you had some money, or could get it. I didn't suppose you would have the nerve to come here penniless, and expect to retain our services."

"We can't afford to work for nothing, you know. If you can manage to get hold of five hundred dollars somewhere come to see us again and we shall be pleased to handle your friend's case. Otherwise, I regret to say, we can't see our way clear to touch it. Good morning, gentlemen."

"Well, I'll be hanged!" exclaimed Leffingwell as the two friends walked gloomily out to the street. "If all other lawyers are as hungry for coin as that fellow I can see where poor Al stays in prison for the rest of his life. How the deuce are we going to raise five hundred dollars ready cash?"

"Maybe we'll be able to find a lawyer who'll be willing to take the case without one of these here bloomin' retainin' fees," suggested Simon, trying hard not to give way to despair. "Hallo, here's a piece of luck!" he added a second later, stooping down and picking up a shining silver coin from the sidewalk.

"What is it?" inquired Leffingwell. "Pooh! A ten-cent piece. And you call that a piece of luck, eh? You can't hire a lawyer for ten cents, old man."

"No. But we can get something to drink and a plate of free lunch apiece with it. We're both pretty near famished—"

"Pshaw! I'm not worrying about

food or the lack of it. If only we could help poor Al—"

"Well, in order to do so we've got to keep up our courage," said Simon. "Once we lose that we're done for, and so is he. Now, there's nothing like a full stomach to give a man plenty of self-confidence. Here's a saloon with a sign in the window readin', 'Beef-stew free with every drink.'"

"Let's go inside and have some of that there stew. I'll bet we'll feel all different after we've eaten it, and we'll be better able to dope this thing out properly."

They entered the saloon, and Simple Simon exchanged the dime he had picked up for two "schooners" and two big plates of substantial looking stew.

Both he and Leffingwell devoured the latter ravenously, for despite their indifference to hunger they were sorely in need of food.

When they had finished Leffingwell espied a newspaper lying on a table.

"Here," he said. "We might as well look through the advertising columns of this paper. Perhaps we shall be able to find work of some sort."

"Sure!" assented Simon. "If we had good jobs we might be able to persuade that there lawyer to take our mess-mate's case by signing our pay over to him for the next couple of years, or, perhaps, for longer."

Leffingwell glanced at the newspaper and uttered an exclamation of amazement.

"What's the matter?" inquired Simple Simon.

"Matter? Good Heavens, Simple! We're the unluckiest chaps who ever lived. We've let five thousand dollars slip through our fingers!"

(To be continued.)

SACCHARINE.

SHE loved him very tenderly,

He loved her not a bit,

Yet Fate decreed that on this night

They side by side should sit.

"Say something sweet, dear," said the maid,

And through her colored glasses

She eyed him fondly as he breathed

The single word—"Molasses!"

IN THE HEIGHT OF PERIL.

By GARRETT SWIFT.

A good friend suddenly chanced upon in a time of sore need,
and snatched away to leave an awful menace in his place.

I STOOD on the corner of Nassau and Pine Streets, looking helplessly and almost disheartened at the hundreds of office-buildings.

I say almost disheartened. I could with the utmost propriety omit the "almost."

Thousands of robust men and boys and young women rushed by me, intent on some errand or other, and yet, in the entire city of New York there seemed to be no work for me.

I had tried honestly, faithfully, and hopefully to obtain employment, but the hope had fled, and discouragement had taken its place.

And yet, only two months previous I had enjoyed a good income, wanted for nothing reasonable in the way of comfort and luxury, and regarded myself as a happily situated and normally contented young man.

I had not been in New York long. I had lived most of my life in Rochester. But when, by the dishonesty and ignorance of those who had charge of my grandfather's estate, from which I drew my income, that income was swept off the face of the earth as though it had never existed, and all my efforts to obtain suitable employment in Rochester had failed, I had come to the great city, honestly and firmly believing that somewhere in its wonderful marts of trade there would be an opening which would enable me to begin life anew, and, perhaps, recover something of old prosperity.

But I had failed. The little money I had left was gone. And I had made no friends in New York to whom I could turn for a loan to tide me over.

I knew there was no use appealing to my uncle in Rochester. He had been the executor of my grandfather's will, and when that portion of the estate which had given me my income was gone, he

had told me coldly, dispassionately, even heartlessly, that I was ruined, and must work my own way. I then appealed to him for temporary aid, but he had answered with his usual frigidity that he had all he could do to take care of his own family. I was young, had received a good education, and could find work.

Well, I had not found it.

Standing there, with the great tide of apparently comfortably situated people rushing past me, the bitterness of my feelings brought impassioned tears to my eyes. I was hungry. I needed clothes.

I turned away from the maddening sight of so much business—none of which was for me—plunged into a man who was in a hurry, was shoved aside with a grunt of remonstrance, and the next moment felt my arm gripped in a hand of iron, and was swung out to the curb by a man who towered far above me.

"Dick Beshurr, is this you?" he cried delightedly. "Well, by Jove! this is a fortunate meeting. Well, well, well. How are you, boy? Look at me! Don't you know me? What's that I see? Tears in Dick Beshurr's eyes? Face pale? By gad, you're hungry, man! Tell me what this thing is that has come to you."

I dashed a hand across my eyes and looked. At first I was bewildered. Then a flood of recollection came over me.

"Robert Fallover!" I exclaimed.

"Bob Fallover to you, my son. And now we've something to say to each other. Say? I guess we have got something to say? But you can't talk nor listen comfortably with that miserable face on you. I know the symptoms, boy. I've felt 'em. I know what the pangs of hunger are when the world has gone against a fellow. Come along with me."

I glanced at his new and perfectly fitting black coat. At his immaculate white vest and shirt bosom and dainty tie. His well-fitting and polished shoes.

"I—I'm not fit." I stammered.

And yet, when I was well-to-do, this man was almost a tramp in Rochester.

"Not fit! Not fit, did you say? Are those the words you just gulped? Let's hear no more of that rot. When Dick Beshurr isn't fit to sit down in a café and get outside of a square meal with Bob Fallover, the skies'll be down under foot and the moon a bank of mud. Come along."

He swung me along with him. His absolute disregard for the hustling mob, his independence of grouchy old men when they grumbled at him, his general air of defiance of the entire world, made me wonder. Then we entered a café.

"You're weak, Dick Beshurr. You're weak. The devil take the man or men who brought this thing upon you. And I could have stopped it all, if I had only known. If I had been earlier. But—I'm here, my boy. Your troubles are over. Damme if that isn't the truest word I ever spoke. I'll do the ordering. If I don't fill you up, count me out when we try again."

He gave a bounteous order. The waiter, even, showed by the expression on his face that he noted the difference between Robert Fallover and me.

"Now, what do you know about it?" he asked. "I went to Rochester. I saw old Tom Beshurr—the deuce take his mean, snaky face! He told me you had gone through your money and was working in New York. But nobody knew where you worked or where you lived. I had business here—I've got business here. And I looked for you, and I advertised for you. Didn't you see it?"

"No," I replied. "I had little time to read anything but the 'Help Wanted' advertisements. I've been trying to get work, but failed."

"But, hang it all, what *happened*? How came you broke?"

"I don't know what happened. You know I had nothing to do with the principal. The estate was to remain intact till all the grandchildren became of age. There were two below that age. One was Uncle Tom's daughter, and the other the son of Mrs. Gadsy, my father's sister. I drew the income till Uncle Tom told me the fortune was gone and I would get no more."

"Uncle Tom be soldered to a dead whale! And he let you tackle New York without money?"

"I had a little. It's gone now, though."

His face broke into a grin. He leaned over and prodded me in the shoulder with his forefinger.

"I'm glad of it. Blamed glad of it," he said.

I looked at him in surprise. He had been so friendly before that it seemed impossible that he could find any reason to rejoice in my misfortunes.

"That's right," he cried gleefully. "I'm glad of it. But not because I want to see you down, boy. Not that, by Heaven! But it'll show Tom Beshurr what Bob Fallover is. He's a curmudgeon, Dick. He could have given me the start that you did, but he wouldn't. But eat, boy, eat. Then we'll go to the office and have a talk."

I did eat. Nature asserts itself always, and I was almost famished. The rich, juicy steak went to the very spot. The coffee braced my nerves.

He ate also. But little more was said at the table. I wondered, however, what turn of fortune's wheel had made this man rich and left me stranded.

"Now," he said, when we had finished, "light that. I remember you liked a good cigar. And this is a good one, if I do say it myself."

We left the place, smoking. Somehow, the world looks different to a man with a full stomach.

He hurried me along Nassau Street, and we entered a large office-building. The crowds of employees were leaving.

We stepped on an elevator. We were the only passengers going up. The frenzy of work had ended for that day.

We left the car on the fourth floor. He led me straight to a door on which was painted:

THE BLACK ROCK MINING COMPANY

Robert Fallover, Manager.

The door was locked. He took a key from his pocket and opened it.

The office into which we stepped was large, composed of several rooms, and elegantly furnished. It had been a warm day, and all the transoms were open.

He threw himself into a chair at a desk and hauled another near him.

"Sit down there, Dick Beshurr, and listen to your Uncle Robert make a speech."

II.

FALLOOVER'S breezy, confident, and world-ownership air amused me. I accepted the chair. He leaned back and half closed his eyes, while through his cigar-smoke he looked at me with an expression that might almost be said to be affection.

"Child," he said—I was twenty-four—"let us recapitulate. Dost have recollection of a youth who lived on the fat of the land in the beautiful city of Rochester? This youth wore good clothes, drove fast horses, and was generally regarded as a fine young fellow and a good match for any girl in Rochester."

"I suppose you mean me," I answered.

"Right you are, Dick Beshurr! By thunder, right you are! And now hark back again to that same city. Dost have recollection of a man more than twice as old as that gilded youth? A man who had some education and yet no brains? A man who was out at the elbows, down at the heel, and frayed out all around the edges? A man who never succeeded in sticking to the miserable jobs he got, largely through some fault of his own, which we need not mention? A man who tried a hundred times to borrow money and succeeded only once?"

"I suppose—"

"Wait. A man who usually needed the attention of a barber, a Turkish bath, and a square meal? A man shunned by those who considered him gone—lost—an outcast? A man whose appearance on a street caused people to make sure their doors and windows were well secured?"

"I was mistaken," I said. "I thought this time you meant yourself."

"And, by ginger, I do mean myself. Don't I remember? Didn't I feel the

stings of their righteous and indignant looks even if I went near their pews in church. Anybody'd think I was going to steal their salvation from under their noses. But there were well-dressed men in some of those pews not as honest as Bob Fallover, and you know it."

"Of course I—"

"Wait, wait, wait! Dost have still further recollection that this seedy individual was on his last legs actually? Bent down under the weight of his non-success? And when, after trying to borrow enough money to give him a start from a hundred rich men and, failing, he came to you, and you gave him three times the amount he had asked for, and refused even to take an I. O. U.? Recollect? You said if I got on my feet, I could pay it; and if not, it didn't matter. Ha, ha! Dick Beshurr, do you remember that? And now, by Heaven, I am on my feet, and my feet are on some of their devilish throats. But I'm your friend, Dick Beshurr.

"I told you I believed I was better fitted for the rougher life in the West; and that if I had money enough to properly clothe myself, buy an outfit, gun, and so forth, I could go out in the mining sections and win out. Remember?"

"I remember."

"I asked you, for a thousand dollars. You had just received your semiannual remittance and peeled off three one-thousand-dollar bills, and pressed them upon me with those words I've already quoted.

"Well, I did go West. From an honest, unconcentrated, and unsuccessful man, with minor faults, I became a man of extreme concentration, with faults as glaring as the beacon-lights of hell. The faults I had had were my own. They harmed me, and no one else. But I dropped them. I became a man of iron nerve and little conscience where sharks of finance were concerned.

"I did not succeed at first; but resolution took the place of discouragement, and at last I won. I remained in the West till two months ago, working on my schemes, developing mines I had discovered, forming a company, and when my work there was done I came to New York to make more money—to break through the shell that surrounds New York society.

"Not for myself, Dick. I care not a ten-penny nail for your painted dames and your mincing damsels. But I've got a girl who needed education and liked the brightness of city life. I am not married, Dick. But—never mind the whole story—I adopted a girl. Madeline is her name. She's here with me, and I'll introduce you.

"Now, I have talked enough about myself. I have told you some—not all—of what I have done, leaving you still ignorant of things I intend to do. But there is plenty of time for that. I've got you now. You are mine, mine, mine—and to the deuce with old Tom Beshurr and his paltry money! And now—we'll get down to the first business transaction between us."

This remarkable man left his chair, walked to a small safe that stood against a partition, and opened it. I saw piles of bills. He counted out some.

"I haven't forgotten at any time," he added, returning to me after he had locked the safe, "but, believing that you were still in the enjoyment of a big income, I waited to have the pleasure of handing you this myself. I knew you had wondered what became of me and your three thousand dollars. Well, you have seen me and heard me. And here is your three thousand, with another thousand for the accommodation."

He threw a roll of bills in front of me.

"I don't want—" I began.

"Nobody cares what you don't want. Doesn't an honest man pay his debts? And could you go borrow three thousand dollars now without security? I can't even do it myself. And then I must pay a devilish big interest at that.

"That money is yours. I am not making you a present or offering you a loan. I owe you that. It is yours. Take it. Put it in your pocket. Go get toggled out as you used to be. Then come back here to me. I've got the place for you, and Madeline wants to meet you. It's time I was getting home. I live in Fifty-Third Street. Put that money in your pocket."

Mechanically, with a peculiar, numbing sense of bewilderment, I tucked the money in my pocket. I had no wallet.

I tried to thank him; but he would

not listen, and then a strange thing happened. His lively manner, his confident arrogance, his masterful spirit, suddenly appeared to desert him. Recollection seemed to sweep over and overwhelm him.

He sat silent with his head bowed, a far-away look in his eyes, that were no longer bright and no longer rested on me. His lips worked slightly, as if he was speaking to himself or to some vision from the past that had come to him.

I did not move. I did not speak. I sat there entranced by this strange change in his manner, and perhaps ten minutes passed.

Then suddenly—from somewhere—I was too startled to think or realize—there came the report of a pistol.

A flow of blood came from a hole in Fallover's temple.

"Bob! Fallover!" I shouted, leaping to him.

He sat perfectly silent. I looked at him. He was dead.

I was temporarily paralyzed. My heart pounded violently against my will.

I glanced around. No one had entered the office. No person was to be seen. There had been no noise except the report of the pistol-shot.

I felt his pulse. It was stilled forever.

Realizing that something must be done at once, and forgetting in my frenzy all that had passed, I rushed frantically from the office to the elevator-shaft. The car wasn't moving. The hour had passed. The elevators were closed.

I shouted for help. Nobody heard me.

I knew there must be a janitor somewhere. I ran to the stairs, and leaped down the four flights with a terrific speed that might have resulted in breaking my own neck. The front door was half open, and I flung it wide.

I raced out and landed against a man who was sweeping the sidewalk. Ashes had been spilled there while taking the refuse from the cellar.

He grabbed me.

"Hey, you!" he shouted. "What you doing? Where you been? What you running away from?"

I grew sick—faint—and dizzy. Everything seemed swimming round me.

"Murder!" I gasped. "Robert Fallover has been shot!"

III.

"HEY? What's that? Wake up?" the janitor cried, shaking me roughly. "Who did you say?"

"Fallover—the mining man—fourth floor."

He gave a loud whistle. There were not many on the street now, and they were all in a hurry to get home. But in a moment a burly policeman was there.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

"Well," said the excited janitor, "I was standing here, just getting through sweeping up ashes, when this fellow comes pell-mell out of the building, running away. He banged into me, and I collared him. I asked him what was the trouble, and he said Fallover, a tenant on the fourth floor, was shot."

"Come in here. Start the elevator. We'll go up."

In a moment we were on our way. The policeman had hold of me, but asked no questions. He was reserving that till he saw what had happened.

He stood within the doorway, looking at Fallover's body, which had remained just as I had left it.

He spent two or three minutes gazing silently around the room.

"Here," he said, "we'll make sure of you."

Before I knew what he intended to do, he had put a pair of handcuffs on me.

"But I did not kill him," I cried, awaking into something like a terrified realization of my plight. "He was my friend."

"Jones, you watch him. Don't let him get away. I'll look around."

I sank exhausted in a chair. The janitor stood over me threateningly. The big policeman took a turn through the offices.

"Nothing disturbed. Nobody here," he reported. "Here's a telephone. I'll send in word."

I heard him speaking into the transmitter. I could not understand all he said, but the words murder, rich miner, and rusty-looking individual came to my ears. I knew that I was suspected of having killed Fallover.

After that the big policeman left us and made a more extended search of the building. When he did come back he was accompanied by two detectives in citizens' clothes.

"This is the place just as I found it," said the uniformed officer. "This fellow was running away, and Jones, the janitor, nabbed him. He was excited, and blurted out about the shooting. I've searched, but there is nobody else in the building."

There was another silence, while the two detectives looked keenly about the place and then scrutinized me sharply.

"I didn't kill him; he was my best friend," I said.

"You'll have a first-class chance to prove that," replied one of the detectives. "Better not say anything, except to answer questions. How long have you known this friend of yours?"

"Ever since I was a little boy."

"You're not such a big man now. What brought you here?"

"I met him on the street. We both lived in Rochester, and when I was rich I loaned him money. I lost my wealth, while he made his. And he took me to a café and treated me to a good dinner and told me about his success in the West."

"Ah! And you followed him here."

"No—I did not. He insisted that I accompany him here. We were talking when the shot came from some part of the place and killed him. I don't think he knew who killed him. I saw no one, and heard no noise except the shot."

"Just so. Stand him up, Jim, while I go through him."

Almost one of the first pockets he put his hand into was the one where I had placed the four thousand dollars Fallover had given me.

"Well—by gewhittaker! This looks like business," he exclaimed. "You don't look much like the sort of man to carry four thousand dollars around loose like that."

"I can explain that," I said desperately. "In Rochester I had loaned Mr. Fallover three thousand dollars. That was years ago, when he was down and out and I had plenty. He wanted to repay the loan. He got the money out of that safe."

"Fishy—very fishy. In that case there must be some papers—receipts or contracts. Where are they?"

"We had none," I said. "When I lent him the money I did not ask for any receipt or acknowledgment of the debt. I did not believe that he would ever have the money to repay me."

"And still you lent him three thousand dollars?"

"Yes. I lent a good deal of money in those days."

He began to whistle, and looked at me with distrust and suspicion.

"More and more fishy. Is that the way they do business in Rochester? Good place to live, that. I've got a sister up there, but I never heard of any such loose transactions. You'll do, young fellow. You ought to be a romancer."

"But can't you see?" I persisted. "I have no pistol. If I had shot him, I could have left the pistol in his hands, and let it be known as suicide."

"Not with four thousand dollars of his cash in your pocket. And there are more ways than one of getting rid of a pistol."

The detective called Jim walked to a window and looked out.

"These windows open on a court," he said. "The bottom of the court is a glass roof over the first floor. There is no glass broken, and nothing down there."

"Take a look around, anyway."

Up to that time they had not touched Fallover's body. But now Jim, in examining the desk, moved the dead man's arm, and, to my absolute and freezing horror, a revolver fell from the sleeve of his coat. It was a small weapon, and as it struck the floor an exclamation came from the four men who were surrounding me.

"Where did this thing come from?" asked one of the detectives. "Who put that up his sleeve?"

"I—I don't know," I stammered. "I'll swear he did not have it—nor did I."

"Now, you are lying one way or another. Jones, did you see any one else leave the building about the time this fellow was running away?"

"I wasn't running away. I was hunting for the janitor," I put in.

"Did you think it was likely—how did you happen to know that at that moment he was sweeping the sidewalk?"

"I didn't know it. But I couldn't make anybody hear me, and if I didn't find him I was going to tell a policeman."

"Likely. The money is the worst thing against you. The revolver is small, and a man might shoot himself in the head, lose his grip on the weapon, and let it drop into his sleeve. But you say he didn't do it."

"No. But stop—I remember something. He had been very gay. He amazed me with his confident air, his hold on life. He gave me the money and sat down again. Then his mood changed. He dropped into a gloomy silence, and paid no attention to me. It was during this silence that he was shot."

"How did you sit? Illustrate the relative positions you occupied."

"I sat facing him—in this chair. He had spoken of an adopted daughter. There may have been some romance in his life. I don't know."

"What did he say about his daughter?"

"He said that he wanted me to meet her. That was all."

"Seems we've done all we can except notify the coroner and take this fellow to headquarters," said one of the detectives to another. "Let the law decide. But—he's got the four thousand dollars."

He stepped to the telephone; there were two separate calls and messages, and he returned.

"Come on," he said. "You are under arrest, charged with the murder of Robert Fallover."

IV.

I SHALL make no attempt to describe my emotions while on the way to police headquarters. I could not do it adequately if I tried.

At times I felt weak, helpless, and utterly lost. At others I would brace up and become angry and defiant.

It made no difference which way I felt, because neither of the detectives would talk to me, and paid no heed, apparently, to what I said. So, after a while, I gave it up.

At police headquarters they told their

story, how they had found me in charge of the janitor and the uniformed policeman, and how the body of Fallover sat, and about the fall of the revolver from his sleeve.

Then I was asked my story, and told it just as it happened and as I have told it here. So far as I could see, it made no impression. The cold, dispassionate faces around me showed neither belief nor pity.

I was locked in a cell during the night. This experience alone, coming on top of the miserable life I had led while in New York, and the horror of the inexplicable murder of Fallover, almost finished me.

I did not sleep. I spent the entire night pondering over the mystery.

I tried to work out a theory that Fallover, when his mind had drifted from his wealth and his mines, and his evident pleasure over his chance meeting with me, to his adopted daughter Madeline, had become fixed on some tragedy or sadness in his life out West, and he had shot himself in an excess of grief or remorse.

But the more I reflected the less likely I believed this to be. If he had been the kind of man to commit suicide, he would have done it in his hopelessly poverty-stricken days in Rochester, and not when he was on the top wave of success, with unlimited wealth at his command.

And I had not taken my gaze from him during the time he sat in that seemingly lethargic state.

I finally discarded the theory of suicide altogether, and went back to the one of murder.

There I was hopelessly in the dark. I did not know what enemies Fallover had made, but presumed from the manner in which he had spoken that he must have made some.

Not knowing a single thing concerning the person who fired the shot, I could not even conjecture the motive for the attack.

If it had been robbery, why had not the murderer attacked me, too, when I had the four thousand dollars in my pocket and the rest of the money was locked in the safe?

But, I reflected, several minutes had elapsed from the time I took the money

and the firing of the shot. It was possible that the murderer had come in suddenly, and had not seen Fallover give me the money.

But, again, the detectives had found about sixty dollars in Fallover's pockets, his fine gold watch and chain, and on his finger was a splendid diamond ring. It was clear that robbery was not the motive, unless the murderer had been frightened away without despoiling his victim.

There was a hitch in that argument, too. Whoever he was, he had taken the risk to enter the room—if, indeed, he had not been there all the time—and had placed the revolver in the arm of Fallover's coat.

It was a most perplexing problem, and my head grew dizzy thinking of it.

Why had not the janitor seen the man? I had heard him say there was no other way out of the building except that one door I had left by. Then where was the murderer? Why had he not been found in the building?

The motive was either revenge, or the purpose had been to kill Fallover to prevent the consummation of plans that might mean ruin to somebody else.

I gave it up. I tried to sleep, but the dead face would come before me when I closed my eyes.

The next morning I was taken before a magistrate. The janitor was there, and the policeman who had come first in response to his signal.

They told their stories. The detectives told theirs. I told mine again, word for word.

I saw as little belief in this group as at police headquarters. There was a young assistant district attorney there to charge me with murder and robbery, and I admitted to myself that the masterly way in which he made out a case against me would almost convince a man he was guilty when he himself knew he was not.

There was nobody there from Fallover's house, and I wondered why his adopted daughter Madeline did not come.

As a result of this inquiry, I was held without bail to await the action of the grand jury, and marched then to a cell in the Tombs prison.

Here my plight was wretched enough. I had absolutely no money. The four thousand dollars Fallover had given me had been taken away.

Finally it was suggested that I engage a lawyer.

I felt that I had but little chance of obtaining the services of a good criminal practitioner with no money to pay him. Nevertheless, I was surprised when one visited me and informed me that he had been designated by the court to take charge of my defense, that no man could be tried and convicted of murder unless he was adequately represented by counsel.

He advanced no encouraging arguments. He spoke of setting up a theory of self-defense. I repudiated that, and insisted that I had never seen the revolver till it dropped from Fallover's sleeve.

"I don't see—let's look into it," he said. "You had lost money, and were very poor. You had hunted all over New York for work and found none. Your own relatives had turned against you. You were in need and hungry. You met Fallover. You saw him rich; and remembered he had got rich on money you had loaned him, and which he had never paid. You went clean off your base. You were weak, and the rest was easy. Emotional insanity. That's our defense."

"Emotional nothing!" I retorted. "I tell you I didn't shoot him."

"You might have forgotten all about it when you recovered your senses."

"Nonsense!"

"My friend and client," he said, "permit me to say that you are ungrateful. When I appear before the grand jury to combat the district attorney for you, I do it without the expectation of one cent from you. It seems reasonable that you should give me some credit. I have had much experience."

"But I was at no time in danger of losing control of myself."

"That isn't the thing. The thing is what we can make the grand jury believe."

He chuckled. I had hated pretense and falsehood all my days. But my life was at stake, and very much at stake.

As he had been appointed by the court or some justice to take my case, I supposed he must have his own way in shaping my defense, and so I argued no further.

What the entire long argument he did finally give was I scarcely knew, but I did know the district attorney had it all his own way.

I was not surprised when I learned that I was charged with the murder and robbery of Fallover.

But because I was poor and friendless, and there were no eye-witnesses to the act, a heavy bail was fixed. I might have been held without bail, but when the bail was fixed at twenty thousand dollars it amounted to the same thing.

There was not a single individual in the entire world who could and who would go bail for that amount with the circumstantial evidence so black against me. It was a foregone conclusion that I would be convicted unless I could assist my attorney in framing up a reasonably decent plea and explanation of it. That my disturbed brain could not do.

Once again in the Tombs, I sat forlorn and hopeless. A turnkey offered me the price of a postage-stamp, and I was permitted to write to my uncle, asking his assistance. I did not even receive a reply.

I did not know when the trial would take place, but was informed that probably months would elapse. The spring calendar was full, and then came the summer vacation.

I cannot tell you, nor can you imagine the miserable, heart-sick condition I was in.

A year of dreary waiting in that cell for my trial, with all the horrifying possibilities and probabilities to follow! I felt that, whatever I was when Fallover had been shot, I would surely be mad before the trial began.

V.

OCCASIONALLY my counsel came to see me. I had no other visitors, and his calls did me no good. There were no further developments. How could there be? There was, apparently, nothing to develop.

I had been in the Tombs two months, and had grown white and thin, when one day the turnkey announced that I had a visitor. I looked in surprise when a tall, white-haired, handsomely dressed man of perhaps fifty-five years of age came to the cell.

He was a rugged, handsome man, but one who had lived. Life had written chapters on his face that I was not experienced enough to read.

"I see that you are surprised to see me," he began pleasantly. "My name is Caspar Dillingtip. I was a friend of Bob Fallover's. I was his partner in several enterprises, and probably the nearest friend he had. Moreover, I know all about you."

"You know all about me!" I repeated in surprise.

"Everything. You see, in the long winter nights when Bob and I were not yet rich, and had no money to indulge in cards and the other pleasures of the towns and camps, we used to sit together, smoke our pipes, and talk. And he has often spoken about you.

"I have heard that loan of three thousand dollars without security drummed over at least once for every dollar in it. And I knew your history up to the time Bob left Rochester, as well as though I had been your brother. And I knew just what he intended to do for you. I knew his plans from A to Z. So, when I read of Bob's death and your arrest, I came on to see about it, and here I am."

If it was impossible to describe my mental condition when I was left friendless and hopeless in the prison, so it is impossible to portray the wave of hope that flushed over me when this cool, calm, determined-looking man of wealth told me that he had come out of the West to study Fallover's death.

There was a chance. He looked like a man who did things.

"I took nothing for granted," he went on. "I knew that a few years make great changes in some men, so I went to Rochester before I said anything to you about it. I inquired of everybody who knew you. I learned that you had remained the same generous, kind-hearted, and well-moraled man you had been as a youth. Then I heard of the trouble and your poverty. But I have

seen many men in the greatest stress and vicissitudes of life, and know moral nature pretty well. And I did not believe, no matter what happened, that a fellow who had been all you were up to two months ago could turn into a monster of blood and rapine in two months of poverty.

"No, sir. I repudiated the belief. I knew what these New York police did not know. I knew that you were telling the truth about lending Bob three thousand dollars, and I knew that he intended to give you four. You see, a man can put three and one together and make four, even if he is only a Western miner. So I reasoned that it would be a strange thing if you had shot Bob and robbed him, and got the exact amount he intended to give you. Such coincidences might occur in fiction, and once in a million years in fact. But it was too improbable for my mind to take in.

"And I reasoned even further. Knowing that Bob intended to give you the four thousand, and finding you destitute and hungry in the street, it would be just his way to take you to dinner first, expatiate on his own success—for he was proud of it—and thus let you know that the loss of the four thousand was nothing to him, and remove any objection you might have to receiving it. So, having prepared you, taken you to his office, and there doing just what I knew he intended to do, you would have no motive to kill him or rob him, for you would have your four thousand dollars, and would also know what a friend you had in him for the future."

As this clear, Western reasoning came from his calm lips I felt, to speak figuratively, all in a heap.

"Oh," I said, "if I can't have Bob Fallover for a friend, thank God for you. Your confidence in me, and your way of putting things, will be of great help to me, I know. I regret that my lawyer, Mr. Kleep, is not here to talk with you."

"I don't need him—now. You see, I have my own way of doing things. I went to him first. We talked it over, and he was delighted with my evidence that explained the truth of your statements. We went together to the district attorney's office, and there we had it all

over again. And we so far convinced the district attorney that a thorough and better investigation should be had, that he agreed to accept the bail of twenty thousand dollars. We then went before the proper magistrate, I deposited twenty thousand dollars cash bail for you, and here, my friend of my friend, is the order for your release on bail."

"Heavens! Am I free?" I gasped.

"You are not yet free from the charge of murder. But you are physically free, and now at liberty to give what assistance you can in ferreting out this mystery. We know that Bob Fallover was shot. And I propose, and I know you will agree with me, that we must all know who shot him."

"I should say so," I murmured.

The warden of the Tombs, who had seen the order of release before I had, was standing just out of my sight. He came forward, congratulated me upon having such a friend, and opened the door of the cell.

I almost fainted with the excess of joy. I clutched Mr. Dillingtip's hand. It was warm, strong, and friendly.

"I have an electric cab at the door. I am stopping at the Waldoria. We will go there," he said.

"But I have no clothes for the most fashionable hotel in New York," I objected.

"That is a matter of minor importance, and can be remedied," he replied. "I want to have a still longer talk with you."

We were soon in the cab, and were whirling up-town toward the Waldoria. How good the spring air felt and tasted! I felt buoyant again.

"I am just as poor, however," I said with a laugh, for even poverty did not seem to matter now. "I don't suppose they will give me back the four thousand?"

"No; but that is of small moment now."

I sat still in surprise. Why was it of small moment? To me it seemed of great importance.

But he offered no explanation, and we soon reached the hotel.

I felt the eyes of the loungers in the great corridor upon me, but marched past them, following Mr. Dillingtip's

lead. He took me to a suite of elegant rooms on the third floor. When he opened the door a young man about my own age and build was there, writing.

"Mr. Walsh, my secretary," said Dillingtip, repeating my name also. "Now, Walsh, Mr. Beshurr is somewhat embarrassed as to clothes. You know you are an extravagant fellow in dress, you poor devil, and have several suits you haven't worn. Get Mr. Beshurr rigged out properly, so that he may go shopping with an appearance coinciding with the dignity of his position."

"Certainly," said the secretary. "My clothes will fit him."

But what sardonic irony was this! Walsh was elegantly dressed, and I knew that Mr. Dillingtip wished me to be properly clothed. But what did he mean by his sarcastic remark about the dignity of my position?

He had not uttered a sarcastic or unfeeling word before. I could not understand why he should so allude to my unfortunate situation. Poverty-stricken, charged with the murder and robbery of a comrade, with not a single ally in the world except himself, who was my friend because Fallover had been, this allusion to the dignity of my position caused me considerable pain and wonder. Yet his face was perfectly calm and smiling when Walsh returned with the garments.

"Here, Beshurr," he said, pointing to another apartment, "that is your room till this thing is settled. Go in there and change your clothes, and then come here and sit down. I've more to say to you."

VI.

THE clothes did fit me pretty well. When I rejoined Mr. Dillingtip, Walsh had gone.

"Sit down. Have a cigar. Now, I suppose, you feel like a new man?"

"I certainly do," I replied. "You have lifted me from the bottomless pit of despair to a heaven of reasonable certainty of freedom from a terrible charge. If I tried to thank you as I should, I would fail miserably. If my actions in future can do it they shall."

A strange, lingering, quizzical look came over his face.

"And in your future actions you will prove to me your gratitude for what I have done and the regard you feel for the memory of Robert Fallover. Now, Beshurr, how far had Fallover gone in his confidences with you when that shot was fired? Be careful—be explicit. Much depends on small things in a case like this, and I have a reason for wishing to know."

"Why, he had scarcely gone into confidences at all," I said. "What he told me was probably known to all his business associates in the West. He spoke of failure at first, and then great success. He spoke of having put himself on his feet, and his feet on somebody's neck. And he said he had adopted a young girl whose name was Madeline, and would take me to see her. And he gave me the four thousand dollars. That's about all."

"M! He didn't tell you anything about the future he had mapped out for you?"

"No. He told me to get some clothes, and to come to him again. He said he had just the job for me, but he did not tell me what it was."

"M! He said nothing about the size of his fortune, the manner in which it is invested, or his plans for it in the future—its disposition at his death?"

"No, sir—not a word."

"I am glad. For, while I now have implicit confidence in you, that fact alone removes a possible cause of doubt that might affect some others."

"Why—I don't understand. How could my knowledge of Bob's plans make me want to kill him?"

He did not reply to the question. He swung round, glanced out of a window, and then got up, took a walk through his rooms and, to my surprise, went to a door and looked out into the private hall that connected the apartments.

Then he came back and sat down.

"Beshurr," he resumed, having apparently dismissed my question, or forgotten it, "did you ever know that Bob Fallover had heart disease?"

"Why—no."

"Or that he was married when he lived in Rochester?"

"Good gracious—no! I can scarcely believe that."

"Nevertheless, it is true. There's a

little place near Rochester named Pittsford, is there not?"

"Yes."

"Very well. He married a girl from Pittsford long before you knew him, I fancy."

"Is she living?"

"I don't know. He could not support her, and his wandering, unhappy way of living made her leave him. She got a divorce, and married again, and went to Europe. That eliminates her. They had no children, and there are no complications. I just thought I'd tell you. I have quite a little to tell you, and as it all has more or less bearing on your future life, it will be interesting to you. Now, I will relate for you the little romance of Bob's life."

"As you know, he had never taken the best care of himself. When you knew him in Rochester he drank heavily?"

"Rather."

"And ate little?"

"He never had money for both."

"Few people do. Well, did you know that he was in constant pain of the most excruciating kind?"

"I never even dreamed it."

"Or that he spent weeks without lying down? Sleeping in a chair, or in a park, sitting on a bench?"

"I knew that. I thought, though, that when he asked for the loan he had braced up, had a boarding-place, and stopped drinking. I wouldn't have given him the money if I had not thought that."

"You were right in your surmise and in your determination. He had stopped. But the pain that had led him to drink grew worse. He had determined that if he must die he would die sober. When he came out to us in the Black Rock region we thought a miner and prospector who wouldn't touch even beer or wine was a curiosity."

"But we got to know him. He told his story. And even when prosperity came he held to that resolution. But he was afraid—always afraid—that his will would some day be too weak, and the increasing pain would drive him back to his old way of stilling it."

"You amaze me with all this."

"I am going to amaze you still more. He fell in love with a widow named

Delany. She was a fine-looking woman, with one daughter, both of them refined and educated, but infernally poor. It seems Delany had been a prospector, and had located a claim in the Black Rock region, and had then died without taking a dollar out of the claim.

"And, though you have heard of Western honesty and ruggedness of character, there are as many rogues out West to the mile in proportion to the population as in the East. And some of these mine sharks juggled that claim away from Mrs. Delany and left her in hopeless poverty.

"Now, here is a phase of Bob Fallover's nature that few people knew. He loved Mrs. Delany, and we all knew that if he asked her to marry him she would do so. But he was afraid. He had ruined one woman's life, or nearly so, and feared that with that intense pain in his heart, which drove him almost frantic at times, he might do the same thing again, or drop dead with heart disease, and so he never asked her.

"But Jack Grimple, as good a fellow as you'd want to meet, did ask her and, despairing of Bob, she married him. Then Grimple got tangled up with a bad lot and spoiled their game, got the claim away from the sharks, and had begun to develop it, when he was waylaid and shot dead.

"This was three years ago. Mrs. Grimple, who had been Mrs. Delany, was soon after taken sick, and died. But before she died, while she was on her death-bed, there was a solemn meeting around the bed, at which I was present; also Fallover, a judge of the Supreme Court of Colorado, a notary public, and several men of honor and position in the Black Rock community. And there, with the proper papers made out and signed and witnessed and attested, Bob Fallover legally and formally adopted Madeline Delany, and swore to protect her and her claim as long as he lived, and to see that when that devilish heart trouble did take him off, if nothing else did before it got ready, he would leave her in hands as honest as his, honorable enough to give her an undivided love, intelligent and educated enough to be a leading and guiding companion, and generous enough to overlook the little phases of character

sometimes called the garishness of the West. That's the Madeline he was going to take you to see. Bob's claim in the Black Rock hills is next to hers.

"And there Bob's will was made and signed and witnessed, and the future of Madeline Fallover, as she must then be called, was settled so far as Bob in his wisdom could settle it."

"All this is not only interesting—it is fascinating," I remarked when he paused. "But you said it would have a bearing on *my* life. I don't see where. You have spoken of its bearing on Madeline's."

"Ve-ry true," he replied slowly. "And yours. I am the executor of Bob Fallover's will. You are his heir to two-thirds of his wealth, after a few minor legacies are disposed of, and Madeline is heiress of the other third, and of course, her own mine remains hers."

"Mr. Dillingtip!" I cried. "Are you dreaming?"

"Not at all. I never dream. I am a hard-headed, practical man of affairs. You have no idea of Bob's depth of gratitude to you. You have no conception of his regard for you as a young man of integrity, moral principle, sound health, and kindness. The fortune would seem to prove it. The other provision of the will goes further."

"And what is that?" I gasped amazedly.

"That you and Madeline become man and wife three months after his death, if you were not married while he was alive. It was his purpose to bring you together. To let you learn to love each other in the usual way. He intended to guide and foster that love till it ripened into the culmination of his hopes. And now he is dead. And you have not even set eyes on the girl whom, according to his wishes, you are to marry."

VII.

"BESHURR!"

This exclamation from Dillingtip roused me from a stupor into which I had fallen as a result of the astounding statements he had made.

"Mr. Dillingtip," I said, "I don't know whether I am awake or dreaming. Fallover's gratitude has assumed a phase that completely overwhelms me.

There are so many things that might have happened which would prevent the consummation of his wishes."

"What are they?"

"I was in good circumstances when he knew me and thought I would be a good husband for his adopted daughter. When my income ceased I was utterly lost for two months."

"The fact that you are here proves that you were not utterly lost. A man doesn't utterly lose himself in two months if he retains his senses. You lost your income through no fault of your own."

"I might have been married."

"So you might."

"Falloover's adopted daughter might refuse to marry me."

"So she might."

"Then what becomes of the will?"

A peculiar smile illumined the face of the man from the West.

"The will stands. Have I not told you that I am executor? I have powers of which the will speaks and of which I have not spoken—as yet. Falloover's will is not mandatory. It expressed his wishes and stipulated that if Madeline refused to become your wife, or for any reason you could or would not become her husband, the other provisions of the will should stand."

"Do you mean to say," I asked in amazement, "that I am still a beneficiary under this remarkable will?"

"Just the same."

I sat for a moment, trying to get this strange matter through my befuddled head.

"Now," said Dillingtip, "we will go call on Madeline."

There was nothing else for me to do. I felt myself a creature in this man's hands.

Falloover's house was but a short drive from the hotel. Dillingtip seemed to know much about it. When he rang the bell and the servant opened the door he said something in a low tone. He was ushered into a pretty little reception-room.

After an absence of about ten minutes, the same man returned.

"Miss Falloover is now with Mr. Lapote," he said. "Will you come to the drawing-room?"

Mr. Dillingtip would. I had to go, al-

though I felt anything-but a reassuring confidence. I scarcely knew just how I did feel.

Bending over a small table, intent on the pages of a book, was a handsome young woman. Opposite her was a young man. He rose at once.

"Mr. Dillingtip!" said the girl.

"I am here," he said. "And permit me to introduce Mr. Beshurr, your foster-father's friend."

There was no blush, no evidence of nervousness, nor even self-consciousness. The girl stepped toward me and extended a friendly hand.

But the young man, whose name had not yet been mentioned except by the servant, stood not only staring at me, but seemingly engaged in a struggle to keep his temper.

"I'll go," he exclaimed in a surly way.

"Why, Mr. Lapote," said the girl; "won't you remain?"

"No."

A stern, uncompromising look came over Dillingtip's face.

"Lapote," he said, "you will oblige me by remaining. Let me make you better acquainted with Mr. Beshurr."

Lapote turned white.

The face of Dillingtip was impassive. It was inscrutable. It was also threatening. Lapote remained.

"Madeline," said Dillingtip, "you are aware that I am the executor of your father's will."

"I know."

"Let me ask you if you know the terms of that will?"

"I do not."

"Did you know that you were expected to become acquainted with Mr. Beshurr?"

"Of course. I have often heard papa speak of him in the warmest terms of friendship."

"Lapote, you seem disturbed," said Dillingtip abruptly. "Are you ill?"

"Why do you ask that?" demanded Lapote almost savagely.

"I have a reason for asking," replied Dillingtip.

I could not understand the man. His entire manner had changed. And Lapote seemed to be terrified.

"I have a reason for bringing you to-

gether," went on Dillingtip. "I would have accomplished it soon. Now, listen. Just three months ago you were working in Omaha for twelve dollars a week."

By this time the girl stood puzzled, white, afraid.

"Yes," said Lapote.

"My partner, Fallover, was there, completing some arrangements with the attorneys who represented his large interests. He chanced to be in the office of the firm for which you worked."

"Yes," gasped Lapote.

"He was seized with one of those severe attacks of heart spasm that made him miserable."

Lapote seemed unable to reply. Madeline was calm. Her face expressed no emotion.

"You borrowed some money from Fallover while he was alone with you and practically unconscious."

"You fiend!" exclaimed Lapote.

"You asked him for the hand of his adopted daughter in marriage."

"Mr. Dillingtip!" exclaimed Madeline. "What are you trying to show?"

"I am showing you just what I have suspected, and what I will prove. This man knew that your father—my partner—wished you, if all considerations were right, to meet, to know, and to marry Mr. Beshurr."

"Mr. Dillingtip!"

She was excited enough now.

"You never knew this. But when Lapote asked Fallover to permit him to pay you his addresses, Fallover, feeling ill and weak, and awaiting the arrival of a physician, told Lapote that this was his wish."

"Then—" I cried, seeming to realize that Dillingtip had been doing a prodigious amount of work of which he had not told me—"this man—"

"This man," said Dillingtip, taking a revolver from his pocket and aiming it at Lapote, who shrank like a cur, without a word—"this man followed Fallover from the West. He knew the terms of the will. He was the man who shot Fallover."

"Oh, my—"

Madeline had fainted. Dillingtip summoned a maid, and she was carried to her room.

"Now," continued Dillingtip, turning

with that calm, stern, iron-like manner to Lapote again, "we will end this scene. Did you shoot at Fallover or at Beshurr? You fired the shot. You killed Fallover. But killing Fallover could not change his will. By killing Beshurr—you might remove a rival."

If expressions can show cowardice, then Lapote's face was the most cowardly I have ever seen.

"Beshurr," said Dillingtip, "call up police headquarters."

"No! Not that! Not that!" cried Lapote.

He cringed. He fell forward before Dillingtip.

"This," said Dillingtip, "is not a suspicion in my mind. It is a fact. Had I not been sure, I never would have taken Beshurr from prison. You had been at the heels of Fallover every day, knowing that he was looking for Beshurr in New York. You knew that he had been in Rochester. You were in Rochester yourself with an intent, I am sure, of killing Beshurr. You have spent hours in the building in Nassau Street, waiting for a meeting between Beshurr and Fallover.

"That meeting came by chance, but you saw it. You had waited weeks to see it. You stood outside of the restaurant when they were inside eating. You followed them back to the office; you *fired at Beshurr*, and shot Fallover by mistake. Then, when Beshurr left the office to find an officer, you placed the revolver in the sleeve of Fallover."

The cringing, cowering wretch lost all self-control.

"No!" he cried. "Not in his sleeve!"

"That's enough," said Dillingtip with a grim, almost saturnine, smile. "You tried to put it in his grasp, to make the murder look like suicide. But the dead hand could not hold it, and you had no time to waste. Neither have we, Beshurr. So far as you are concerned with the death of Fallover, it is over. The rest that I have told you depends on yourself and Madeline."

Dillingtip seemed to have a magical control over the entire house. At his call two men came into the room almost as though they had been waiting for the call. In half a minute the terrified Lapote was

seized and bound, and in fifteen minutes was in the hands of the police and on his way to the Tombs, from which I had been so remarkably and fortunately liberated.

He made scarcely any defense. Dillingtip had gone so carefully, so shrewdly, so understandingly at work, keeping his actions so secret that no one but

Madeline herself knew he had left the West.

So every step necessary to convict Lapote had been taken.

The law declared Lapote the murderer of Fallover. The terms of the will stood good as regarded the estate.

The law never declared Madeline my wife. She married Dillingtip.

NOT FOR SALE.

By ELBERT D. WIGGIN,

Author of "Nobody's Fool."

The series of misadventures set on foot for one Austrian lieutenant of hussars after he had fallen in with an American party of three.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

COUNT LASZLO CHEGNAY, of the Austrian hussars, meets and falls in love with a young American actress named Muriel Bonner, an intimate friend of the beautiful heiress, Joy Van Brunt. Chegnay's friend, Captain Felix von Altdorff, is in love with Miss Van Brunt; but through a misunderstanding, aggravated by Max Horowitz, the gossip of the regiment, the two men come to consider themselves rivals. A duel between them is interrupted by Van Brunt, who persuades the combatants to consider their honor satisfied.

Old General Chegnay, who wishes his son to marry Miss Van Brunt, reproaches Laszlo for his attentions to the actress and threatens to disown him. Laszlo, in a rage, resigns from the regiment and renounces his father.

CHAPTER VII.

THE FACE IN THE MOONLIGHT.

WHATEVER soreness remained in Laszlo's mind as a result of the perturbing interview through which he had just passed speedily evaporated under the spell of Muriel's society.

Never had she seemed more sweet, more stimulating, more wholly desirable to him than on this afternoon, when for her dear sake he had relinquished all the ambitions, prejudices of class, and expectations which had been instilled into him from childhood.

A subtle sense of intoxication thrilled through him at the nearness of her presence. With her smile upon him, there was nothing which he felt that he could not do or dare.

No longer did any doubts or misgivings beset his mind. Instead, he thrilled with a consciousness of emancipation, of freedom—for what counted all that he

had lost beside the joy of winning her? And with her won, ever at his side to inspire and cheer him on, must not in time all other things be added unto him?

Oh, the dynamic energy of a woman's smile, when youth is pulsing through the veins and love pants hotly in one's throat! It has sent thrones tottering, uprooted dynasties, changed the map of the world a thousand times.

And now to this penniless young man, cast adrift from all his moorings, it made the stern struggle ahead seem no more than a diverting romp, success something for which he had but to stretch forth his hand.

"I cannot fail," his heart kept telling him. "Victory is sure, if I but gain the right to wear her colors to the battle!"

He therefore determined that he would learn his fate at her hands that very evening. He believed from a hundred indications she had given him in the past

few weeks that she loved him even ~~as~~ he loved her; yet one can never be quite sure in such a case, and he wanted to hear her say it with her own lips.

He realized, of course, that a marriage could not take place until he had been able to establish himself in some sort of fashion; but in the meantime he wished to be assured of his reward, to feel that she was waiting for him, an incentive to his efforts.

Moreover, he considered the place to which they were bound—a quaint, old road-house built in the form of a chalet, and lying back in the hills outside the city—as a most fitting spot for his proposed declaration, since it was pleasantly associated with some of the most charming episodes of their companionship.

Chegnay, it will be remembered, had neglected almost everything else since the actress's arrival in Vienna in order to devote himself to her entertainment, and many were the excursions she had taken under his guidance out into the environs of the capital.

Whenever possible, they had always managed to drop in for refreshment at this little inn, delighted alike with the excellent, homely fare provided and the beauty of its situation.

Usually, Muriel was as gay and sprightly as a child when they were off on one of these expeditions, interested in everything taking place around her and asking all manner of questions; but to-night, as they sat on the balcony of the little chalet, she was strangely silent, and her eyes were turned with a half-questioning gaze toward the encompassing mountains.

She realized from her companion's manner that he had determined to speak—trust a woman's intuition to know that—and perhaps she was looking back with just a shade of regret to the care-free, happy days of girlhood she saw slipping from her.

On the way thither, as they passed out beyond the fortifications into a suburban road lined with tulip-trees in the golden glow of the late afternoon, Laszlo had been upon the point of an avowal, and again after they had reached their destination and were waiting for the meal to be spread; but each time in a spirit

of shrinking shyness she had delayed the words leaping to his lips.

Now, however, she saw that his question could no longer be staved off or postponed, and she waited with half-timid, half-rapturous thrills for his beginning.

The dinner was over, and they had moved away from the table.

Laszlo's coffee-cup sat forgotten at his elbow, and his neglected cigarette on the railing of the balcony burned itself away in filmy, blue spirals, melting into the haze of the twilight, for it was the hour of the gloaming.

For a space—how long one could not say—neither of them spoke; then of a sudden the actress realized that he had caught her hand in his and was telling her of his love—telling her not with murmured eloquence and studied grace—but hoarsely, almost roughly, as a man speaks under the stress and sincerity of a great passion.

He literally gave her no chance to protest or withstand him, even if she had been so inclined; but swept her off her feet by the ardor of his pleading—off her feet in fact as well as in figure of speech—until at last she felt herself nestling close, close in the shelter of his arms.

And, oh, how glad she was to be there, glad to hear the tumultuous beating of his heart, to feel the strength of the muscles clasping her so fast, glad—inexpressibly glad—to surrender herself into his keeping.

His voice had lost its strained gruffness now, and was keyed to a softer note, as he stroked her hair and muttered brokenly little tender love-words, until at last it was hushed altogether; for she had raised her face to his, and with that first ecstatic meeting of their lips the quiet of the purple dusk wrapped itself about them.

Presently, however, as the darkness advanced and the stars began to come out across the sky, they fell to talking, speaking of the future and discussing plans as lovers will; and then it was that Laszlo told her of the break with his father, and of his intention to leave the army and strike out into a new field.

He felt that she ought to know it, but he told it unwillingly and made as light

of the matter as possible; for he was afraid lest in a spirit of self-sacrifice she would refuse to stand in the way of what she might consider his career.

But he need have felt no fear. She only nestled closer to him when she comprehended the full extent of his renunciation, and a little enigmatic smile flitted across her lips.

Once he had an idea that she was on the point of telling him something, of making some sort of a revelation to him—a proposition, he suspected, that he should become her manager, and he steeled himself to decline it. He would make his own way in the world, he told himself, not climb into an easy berth on her shoulders.

But if she had entertained any such suggestion, she evidently decided not to make it then; for she restrained herself with an effort and asked instead:

"What are you planning to do, then, my own? Knowing nothing except the military life, you will have to begin at the foot of whatever ladder you undertake, and that means a long, hard struggle, does it not?"

"Oh, not so very long," he assured her eagerly. "Not long at all, I am certain, now that I have the hope of claiming you to spur me on; for you will wait for me, will you not, Muriel?"

She smiled a little indulgently at his untried optimism; but there was no faltering in the answer which her eyes returned.

"Forever, Laszlo, if need be," she answered. "I have given myself to you; and whether you are rich or poor, I shall be ready to marry you whenever you say the word."

He made the only suitable acknowledgment for what he considered such an expression of trusting loyalty, and for a time practicalities were again forgotten. But when mundane things were once more permitted to occupy their attention, Chegnay took it upon himself to explain what he proposed doing.

"As you say," he admitted, "my training hitherto has in no way fitted me for any remunerative profession or calling; and thus having to start in anew at the bottom, it would in the ordinary course of things probably be a long while before I could make any headway.

"But you have forgotten one avenue, Muriel, along which it has seemed possible to me that I might make the speedy success which is so necessary. I am speaking of my talent and love for music."

"But," she interrupted with all of a successful artist's unconscious depreciation of the amateur, "that is almost hopeless, Laszlo. You would have to spend months in training before you could dream of making a public appearance, and even so—forgive me—I am afraid your voice is of no more than mediocre quality."

"Oh, I was not thinking of singing," he laughed. "Thank you, I know my limitations quite as well as you do."

"What then?" the little disapproving pucker between her brows in no wise abated. "Surely, you have no idea that you could become an instrumentalist, a concert performer?"

"Indeed, no. To put a stop to any further conjectures, I may as well tell you it is composition I have in mind."

"Composition? Can you compose?"

"Oh, yes," carelessly. "An ability to make music always goes with the gipsy blood, you know; and then I took a pretty stiff course in thorough bass and harmony some years since. Several of my little things—songs and that sort of light stuff—have been published from time to time, although it was done anonymously, and I never got so much as a florin from any one of them. Indeed, that drinking-song I played for you the other night, and which you teased so to know where I had heard it, was something I had turned off myself only that afternoon."

"What?" Her eyes were wide now with a distinctly flattering wonder. "That lovely, rollicking thing! And you composed it? Oh, Laszlo, you are—you are a genius!"

"Hardly that," he smiled; "but I really do think I know how to strike a popular chord, and recently—since I have come to know you—the idea has been with me that I might be able to write a light opera. As a matter of fact, you gave me the inspiration for it, and you—your personality—will dance through every note of it. Listen, here is the principal *motif* of the thing."

Beating time with his left hand, he hummed softly a few bars set to waltz measure, which so appealed to the girl's fancy that, catching the idea, she would not be content until he accompanied her within the inn and played the full movement through for her upon the piano.

The instrument which the little road-house boasted was far from being any "great shakes"; but even a grind-organ, so Muriel declared, could hardly have spoiled the delicate, exquisite, haunting melody which rippled out from beneath Chegnay's fingers.

She recognized now what he had meant when he said that she inspired the theme; for in it she heard expressed all the charm of their young love, the doubts and fears which had assailed him at times; but clear, pure, and resonant through it all the time that determined note which Laszlo himself had voiced when he said: "There is the woman I am going to make my wife!"

"Bravo! Bravo!" she cried, enthusiastically clapping her hands when he had finished. "I have no doubts now, my darling. It is superb, magnificent. You cannot help but succeed."

And more of an encomium than any word she could utter was the flash of pride and admiration in her happy eyes whenever she turned them upon him.

"But, Laszlo," she finally questioned, when they had once more returned to their balcony, "a complete opera score is not written in a day: It will take time, and a good deal of it, for you to work out your ideas and get everything in shape. You must"—she hesitated a moment for fear of hurting his feelings—"must let me be your banker meanwhile."

"I am making so much more than I need," she pleaded, "and it would really be a splendid investment for my surplus cash; for, of course, I would insist on receiving a share of the proceeds. Please, Laszlo. It is really only a business arrangement, an advance in the expectation of making big profits, something which is often done."

But he was obdurate; neither coaxing nor entreaties could induce him to accept a cent of her money.

"No, sweetheart," he said. "It is good and generous of you, and I would

accept assistance as readily from you as from anybody else; but, you see, I want to carry this thing through all by myself. I've got to prove to myself that I am a man capable of fighting my own battles, and not having to rely on any outside help in order to win.

"And I shall get along all right while I am writing the opera, too," he averred. "Have no fears that I shall starve in a garret. I have already thought that out, and have decided that the best thing for me to do is to get a position as *Rittmeister* in one of the riding schools. I can secure the job easy enough on my field-day record; and, although it is somewhat of a come-down for a late officer of hussars, it is respectable, and will not only provide the necessary bread and cheese, but also give me sufficient leisure for my greater work."

So, the matter was finally settled, and they turned from these more prosaic details to those eternal questions of the newly betrothed: "When did you first begin to love me?" and "Am I the only one you ever really loved?"

But the moon was beginning to rise now, shedding its soft luster over the rugged summits of the Kahlenberg, and they felt that the time had come for them to leave.

Regretful to quit their little balcony, though, they stood there a moment, their arms about each other, silently gazing out over the broad prospect revealed to their view.

From this aerie of theirs they could see the wide sweep of the Danube, a glint of silver beyond the western hills; while nearer at hand, yet far enough away to give it the effect of magic, twinkled the myriad lights of the city, and in the background lurked the range of frowning peaks.

The young officer stood out at the front of the balcony plainly revealed, but Muriel, beside him, was more or less in the shadow.

"Ah, what a beautiful, beautiful world!" she breathed softly.

Chegnay made no answer, though; for a sudden rustling in the osage-orange hedge below them had drawn his attention from the view.

Leaning forward, he discerned the dark figure of a man making his way

through the thorny barrier with the evident intention of seeking cover in a thicket just beyond.

Then he recoiled with a sharp exclamation; for he had caught a fleeting glimpse of the intruder's face in the moonlight, and it was that of Von Altdorff!

CHAPTER VIII.

SQUELCHING A SENSATION.

It was a lucky thing for Muriel that the theater hour is late in Vienna; a still more lucky thing that a curtain-raiser had recently been added to the bill of "*Mlle. Modiste*."

Otherwise, even with the utmost urging of their vehicle, she must certainly have missed a performance; for so long had she and Laszlo lingered at the chalet that, despite the racing speed he made in getting back to town, she had just time to slip into her costume and spring out to the wings for her entrance.

As she appeared in the millinery shop which forms the setting for the first act, Chegnay strolled in at the front of the house, and took the unobtrusive position which he had occupied regularly each evening since the beginning of her engagement.

The words and action of the opera had, of course, grown very familiar to him by this time; yet, every night he felt a fresh sensation of wonderment in realizing that the pert, saucy, diverting figure upon the stage was his Muriel.

And to-night more than ever was he struck by this contrast between the artist and the woman. Could this lively will-o'-the-wisp be his pensive-eyed maiden of the moonlight and the balcony?

Undoubtedly, it was she; but, ah, he sighed admiringly, what an actress she was!

Glowingly he pictured to himself the tremendous success she would make when she appeared in his composition—every line of it, and every stave she sang, molded to her personality.

So absorbed did he become in these roseate dreams of the future that he did not observe Max Horowitz signaling wildly to him from the other side of the house, until at last the latter, despairing

of attracting his attention, rushed over and tapped him on the shoulder.

"What do you think, Chegnay?" he whispered excitedly, his eyes goggling with rapture over the possession of a new and astonishing piece of tittle-tattle. "What do you think? There is an American over here, a Mr. Caxton, of New York, with whom I happened to fall into conversation, and he tells me that our fascinating *Mlle. Modiste* is no more Muriel Bonner than he himself is."

"What!" Laszlo was taken aback for a moment; then a flicker of incredulous scorn passed over his lips. "Your imaginative friend has evidently been dining well."

"No, no," Horowitz vehemently repelled the insinuation; "he is as sober as either you or I."

"Then he must be crazy," impatiently. "Who does he say she is, pray?"

"He doesn't know. That is what he asked me. But he asserts that he is well acquainted with the real Miss Bonner, and that this woman is no more like her than day is like night. She, he claims, cannot act, whereas he is wild with enthusiasm over the performance of our friend."

"Ah"—Laszlo gave a quick nod of comprehension—"I see what he means! I have often felt that way about her myself. He evidently knows her only socially, and to such a person her acting must always be a revelation."

"No, no," again insisted Horowitz, determined not to be balked of his sensation. "He declares that this is an entirely different woman, I tell you. Height, eyes, hair, voice, movements, general appearance—nothing corresponds. It is only as a spectator at the theater, too, that he knows the real Muriel. He says he has often seen her in this very piece. Yet, he also admits that our Vienna star far outclasses her at every point. Now, what does it all mean, do you suppose?"

What did it all mean? That was, indeed, a question; for Chegnay could see, from the other's confident air and assured utterance, that he at least was reporting the stranger's surprising allegation exactly as he had heard it.

Could it be, then, that the New York

man was lying, or indulging in one of those bewildering American jokes? Laszlo would have so concluded without question, had not the memory recalled to him at that moment of Muriel's peculiar hesitation at the chalet, when she had seemed, once or twice, on the point of disclosing something to him, and then had drawn back.

Still, any such absurd explanation as this—! He was about to turn his shoulder upon Max Horowitz with an intimation that both he and his informant might go to the dickens, when the suggestion suddenly occurred to him that, whether or not there was any basis of truth to the American's statement, it might through repetition and embellishment easily cause annoyance or even damage to the actress.

In any event, and at any cost, this chattering gossip-monger must be silenced before he had the opportunity to spread the tale further abroad.

He therefore let no hint of any misgivings upon his part appear on the surface, but lightly scoffed at his companion's credulity.

"Pshaw, Max," he said, "you are always stirring up a mare's nest. Can't you see that the American was simply having sport at your expense?"

"Not so, not so," demurred the diminutive officer. "I was watching the man, and I tell you he was thoroughly surprised when he saw our friend come on the stage. 'Ah, they are trying out an understudy to-night, I see,' he said, turning to me. 'No, *mein Herr*,' I replied, 'that is Miss Bonner herself.' 'Miss Bonner?' he sneered, and then fell silent, for she had begun to sing; but when she had finished, he turned to me again and said:

"Say, friend, you might make me believe that screech-owls are canary birds, but not that Muriel Bonner ever warbled like that. Why, this girl can run rings around her, and not be half-trying. Come, tell me on the square who she is, and why she is taking the part, when they have Muriel Bonner billed?"

"Yet, as I say, my dear Chegnay, it was not so much what the fellow said which convinces me, as his look, his manner, his bearing. Trust me to know amazement when I see it; and I assure

you he was dazed, staggered, unable to comprehend. No, believe me, Laszlo, this was no Yankee fun-making. He was neither attempting to deceive me, nor—what is it Miss Van Brunt says?—to 'lamb' me."

"'Kid' you, you mean," corrected Chegnay, more apt at picking up the slangy idiom of the heiress. "But that just goes to show how little you can be depended upon, Max. You never get anything right; and, of course, in this instance, you also become muddled."

He paused a moment to consider. More deeply impressed with the narrative than he cared to show, he saw, too, that he would have to employ different measures in order to choke off Horowitz.

"Yes," he continued, "in order to get the straight of your story, I see I shall have to interview this Mr. Caxton myself."

"All right," agreed the other readily; "nothing would please me better. Come over with me, and you will speedily find out that I have made no mistake."

But this suggestion did not chime in at all with Laszlo's plans. If by any chance the American should persist in his amazing declaration, he wanted, if possible, to have a few words with him alone.

He therefore shook off the talkative one's clutch upon his sleeve.

"No," he said impatiently, "you will stay here. Heaven knows what sort of a rigmarole you would make out of the affair if you were permitted to stick your donkey's head into it again."

The pugnacious little hussar bristled up on the instant.

"Lieutenant Chegnay," he blustered, "that comes perilously near the line of an insult. I demand an immediate retraction, or else you may expect to be waited upon in my interest."

A month before Laszlo would have seen nothing extravagant in such bombast; but unconsciously he had been imbibing American ideas from his association with Muriel, and now he only gave an intolerant snort.

"Nonsense," he retorted sharply. "Everybody knows that you are a blundering jackass, Max, and all the fighting in the world won't change the fact.

"And mark you, further," sternly, as

the other angrily struggled to interrupt, "if you annoy me any more, or if you dare to breathe a word of this ridiculous *canard* to another living soul, I shall not fight you; no. I shall simply do as our friend Mr. Van Brunt threatened, and spank you in the most public place that I can find."

Horowitz fairly choked with impotent wrath; but there was a quailing terror in his glance which satisfied his opponent the edict would be obeyed. Eager as he was to circulate the interesting tit-bit upon which he had stumbled, the gossip, recognizing that Chegnay was not in a humor to be crossed, was evidently even more solicitous of avoiding the revolutionary tactics proposed by his brother officer.

It required, but one glance to be assured that no more present trouble was to be anticipated from him; and Laszlo, therefore, strode swiftly away in search of the American.

Not, indeed, that there was much trouble in singling the latter out; for his tall, well-groomed figure towered up from the throng of *boulevardiers* surrounding him, like a lighthouse above the shoals.

He was applauding vigorously at the completion of one of the star's songs; but, as his hands dropped to his side, the pleased, appreciative look upon his face gave way to one of renewed perplexity, and the count, edging close up to him, heard him mutter:

"By Jove, it's got me guessing! If she was a fake, I could understand it; but why, will somebody please tell me, should a crackerjack like her take the name of Muriel Bonner?"

Laszlo shrank back, his own face clouded and perturbed. It was no blunder of Horowitz's, then, as he had hoped, nor any jesting hoax, either. This man was honestly bewildered, convinced beyond question that the woman on the stage was, for some reason or other, sailing under false colors, and, moreover, not to be lightly swerved from that conviction.

Reflectively, Chegnay withdrew a step or two, and studied the chap from between narrowing lids.

"Ah," he finally commented, drawing a little breath of satisfaction, "evident-

ly a gentleman—an American gentleman. That may mean that I shall yet succeed."

CHAPTER IX.

A BLIND LEAD.

WHILE Laszlo was pondering, the curtain fell upon the first act, and with a sudden impulse he stepped forward and touched the stranger upon the shoulder.

"Mr. Caxton, I believe," he said—"Mr. Caxton, of New York."

The other drew back at being thus unexpectedly accosted, but, after a pause, admitted his identity.

"You have the advantage of me, sir, however," he added, with a searching glance.

"I am the Count Laszlo Chegnay," hurriedly, "late lieutenant in the Tenth Hussars. May I have a word with you, *mein Herr*—a word in private?"

As he spoke, he motioned toward the swinging doors leading into the foyer.

Caxton debated the point a moment. Chegnay's proud old name and military rank meant no guarantee to him; for he had been warned that Vienna is full of blackmailers, and that even some of the army and nobility are not above resorting to such methods to increase their dwindling exchequers.

For all he knew, this might be some new style of confidence game to entrap an unwary foreigner.

Still, the frank, engaging countenance and manly air of his interlocutor impressed him favorably, and, since the suppressed eagerness of the other and the unaccountable request seemed to promise an adventure, he yielded in the end to his inclination and followed his new acquaintance outside.

The first words addressed to him, however, caused him to regret his easy compliance and brought back all his suspicions; for Laszlo, full of his subject, opened up by asking breathlessly:

"Are you aware, *mein Herr*, that you have just been talking to the most dangerous man in all our city?"

"So, this is the game, eh?" thought Caxton.

His favor was to be won by warning him of threatened peril, in order that he

might later be induced to requite the obligation. No doubt this fellow and the little fire-eater with whom he had been chatting a while back were in cahoots, the latter of course now claiming to have been insulted in some way and breathing out threatenings and slaughter, while this new friend would show himself willing to exert his good offices and avert calamity from the foreign gentleman's head.

Indignant though he was at the quality of the supposed trick being played upon him, the New Yorker could not help being amused at the thought of the instrument selected to strike terror to his soul.

"A dangerous man, is he?" and he smiled ironically. "Why, my friend, I am in the habit of eating a dozen like him raw every morning for my breakfast. Thank you for nothing, *monsieur*. I fancy I am able to take care of myself pretty well, even against so redoubtable a personage as your 'dangerous' pal. And that, too," he added significantly, "without assistance."

He was about to turn on his heel and march back haughtily into the theater; but Laszlo, not to be denied, threw himself impetuously in the way.

"But you do not understand, *mein Herr*," he urged. "I do not mean that he is dangerous to you, or indeed to any one, physically. I mean that his clacking tongue is a menace to me."

Caxton began to believe now that he had a crazy man to deal with, and edged off a little.

"But what have I to do with that?" he questioned, to gain time.

"Nothing, so far as I am personally concerned. But how if a lady were also involved—a countrywoman of yours?"

"Ah!" Caxton began to see a glimmer of light, and once more reconstructed his views as to the other's sanity.

"That," he said, thoughtfully rubbing his chin, "might, as you suggest, be of interest to me. But first, I would have to know the circumstances. Who, may I ask, count, is this imperiled countrywoman, and what is the nature of the danger represented by your friend of the clacking tongue?"

Laszlo considered a moment.

"Let me rather submit a case to you covering all the facts," he proposed at

length, "and then allow you to draw your own conclusions."

"Sort of hypothetical question, eh—such as they ask in the big murder trials at home? All right; fire ahead, but don't spin it out too long, count. The curtain will be up again pretty soon, you know, and I wouldn't miss any of this performance for a farm."

For all his show of indifference, though, the New Yorker was vitally interested, since he had deduced without much trouble that the promised disclosure had to do with the same puzzle which he had been turning over in his brain all evening, and which he had voiced in that muttered soliloquy just before Laszlo came up: Why was so accomplished an actress appearing under a name to which she not only had no claim but which in fact belonged to a person of vastly inferior ability?

He therefore gave earnest attention to his companion as the latter began.

"Suppose," said Laszlo, "that this countrywoman of yours were an artist? A painter, let us say, or a writer—"

"Or, possibly, a milliner?" suggested Caxton aptly.

"Yes; possibly, a milliner. And suppose for some good reason of her own—in no way discreditable to her, however—she chose to take the name of another artist for a season? Suppose, too, that this were done in a city where there was but slight probability of the harmless deception becoming known, but where, if it did become known, it would through misconstruction and perversion of the facts be likely to work incalculable damage to the young lady's future?"

"And suppose," broke in Caxton, catching the drift, "suppose a blundering American happened along at just the wrong moment and tipped off the secret to an indiscreet babbler whom to tell was just the same thing as to put it in the newspaper? You want to know, then, count, what the said blundering American might be prepared to do in order to straighten matters out?"

Laszlo bowed.

"You have inserted it, *mein Herr*," said he, "in the shell of a nut."

"Well, suppose it were you," questioned Caxton; "what would you do?"

"I?" ardently. "Ah, *mein Herr*, if

I were that chivalric American, I would lose not a moment in going to Max Horowitz and telling him that he had entirely misunderstood my words. I would say I had simply meant that the artist's improvement was so astonishing it seemed to me as though she must be a different person. Is not," anxiously—"is not that what you would do, Mr. Caxton?"

But the New Yorker frowned undecidedly, and once more stroked his chin.

"What are the reasons for this shamming?" he demanded sharply. "I shall have to know them before I consent."

"But, *mein Herr*, I have already assured you that they are in no way discreditable."

"All the more cause for letting me know them, then."

And from this position nothing that Chegnay could say or do would move him. Indeed, it presently became so plain that he regarded this very reticence as proof of chicanery that at last, in sheer self-defense, Laszlo had to confess that he did not know the reasons for the imposture himself.

"How, then, could you guarantee the affair to me as absolutely innocent?" frowned his inquisitor.

Chegnay flushed deeply, but there was no wavering in the steady gaze with which he met the imputation.

"I still assert that," he said quietly; "and so sure am I of it that I am ready to stake my honor upon its truth. That the woman I know as Muriel Bonner has done it is all the proof that I require."

For a moment the big American stared at him; then his brawny right hand reached out and caught Laszlo's in a crushing grip.

"I guess I'll let it be proof enough for me, too," he assented heartily. "You're right, count. It's a blind lead, and we can't tell just where we are going to come out; but we'll back the little American girl to be straight goods, if it takes the last shot in the locker!"

he joined Chegnay, ten minutes or so later, to report on the result of his interview with Horowitz. "I swore by all the nine gods that I had never said, thought, dreamed, or imagined what he claimed I had; but, on the contrary, was ready to maintain and avouch against any and all comers that your Muriel Bonner was the single simon-pure, blown-in-the-bottle and guarantee-printed-on-the-wrapper specimen, and, furthermore, the only one I had ever known."

"And is he now satisfied?"

"He's got to be," a trifle grimly. "I told him when he started to give me some lip once, that I was not accustomed to having my word doubted by such shrimps as he, and that if he didn't shut right up, or if he ever referred to the matter again, I would lay him across my knee and give him a spanking of the sort that 'mother used to make.'

"Funny go!" and he broke into a peal of irrepressible laughter at the recollection. "What do you think the beggar said when I told him that? He gave me a quick, startled look out of the corner of his eye, and asked me if spanking was the accepted mode for settling disputes of honor in America?"

"Of course, I told him that it was," again bursting into a series of ecstatic guffaws; "and, by Jove! do you know he actually seemed relieved. Hitherto, he said, he had always regarded such a threat as an affront to his dignity; but if it was merely a new form of challenge, he should no longer take offense. Do you suppose anybody has ever handed out the same line of talk to him before?"

"Oh, yes," assented Laszlo, unable, for all his disquietude of spirit, to forbear a smile at Horowitz's expense. "Yes, he has good reason to believe it an American custom. In fact, he—"

But he was interrupted by a sharp exclamation from his companion, who, with mouth agape and eyes popping from his head, was staring at a belated party just entering the theater.

In the van, like a drum-major marshaling his hosts, marched the Yankee millionaire, Van Brunt, while behind him, surrounded by a bevy of satellites, both male and female, swept his radiant daughter.

CHAPTER X.

ALMOST AT THE STAGE-DOOR.

"SHADES of George Washington! I lied so hard to him that I almost convinced myself," ejaculated Caxton when

"Heaven help me!" gasped Caxton. "Is it possible that I am beginning to see things?"

Then he turned to Chegnay, and clutched him fiercely by the sleeve.

"Who," he demanded—"who are those people just coming in?"

"Mr. Van Brunt and his party, do you mean?" questioned Laszlo, regarding him with some surprise. "Surely, you ought to know him. Then the man with the bald head is General Dorsey, your ambassador, and next to him is—"

"No, no," impatiently; "I know all of them. It is the women that I am curious about. Who, for instance, is the blonde in that stunning pink satin gown?"

Laszlo cast a second careless glance toward the group.

"Oh," he smiled, "so you, too, have fallen a victim, eh? Well, no wonder. That is the conqueror of all hearts, our American heiress, Miss Joy Van Brunt."

"Smitten, nothing!" muttered Caxton, still visibly agitated. "But, mind you, I don't say that I am not interested. Miss Joy Van Brunt, eh? Here, give me your glasses a minute."

As he spoke, he snatched Chegnay's opera-glasses from his hand, and leveled them in a long, scrutinizing stare upon the beauty who had by this time taken her place at the front of the lower right-hand box.

One angle of vision after another he tried, and adjusted and readjusted the focus at least a dozen times; but at length he gave over his prolonged inspection and turned to Laszlo, his face a puzzle of mixed emotions.

"Son," he announced with an uncomprehending shake of the head, "what it means, or what is back of the deal, is utterly beyond me. But, as I am a sinner, that woman up yonder in the box is none other than the real Muriel Bonner!"

It was now Chegnay's turn to gasp, and to question his companion's sanity.

"It cannot be," he insisted. "You are beside yourself."

"That is what I have been telling myself," admitted the other. "'Caxton,' I've been saying, 'you are either drunk or dreaming'; but it doesn't work. Everything else is as it should be in a

normal, waking world. You are you; I am myself; none of these people have become transformed into pink rabbits or green rhinoceroses. Only this one thing is out of kilter—the girl you tell me is Joy Van Brunt, and who is sitting up there beside old Cyrus, is Muriel Bonner, and I am ready to take my oath upon it."

Laszlo continued to gaze at him incredulously, but was bound to confess that there was no sign of mental aberration about the fellow. Still—?

"No," averred Caxton, reading the unspoken thought; "I'm sane, all right. Look at that," and he stretched out a muscular arm as steady as a rock. "No symptoms of any sort of 'willies' there, is there? No jangled nerves? Eyes clear and intelligent, ain't they? Talk, reasonably rational? By Jove, count, I tell you it's not I that is wrong. It's that woman up there, flaunting in borrowed plumage; she and—"

"Whew!" he interrupted himself with a sudden start of recollection. "By Jove! I had forgotten about the other one for the minute. But now I'll put it up to you square, count, and give you three guesses to tell me the truth. If Joy Van Brunt is really Muriel Bonner, will you kindly inform me, then, who Muriel Bonner may rightly be?"

"Sounds like one of those 'How old is Ann?' gags, doesn't it?" he commented. "But I guess you catch my meaning. 'Button, button,' or 'Who's who in Vienna?' What's the answer, count?"

Chegnay only gave him a bewildered glance, and threw up his hands. He was completely staggered by this new complication to the enigma. Then he straightened up with a sudden air of determination.

"What does it mean?" he repeated. "I have no more idea than you. But," with a movement toward the door, "I am going to find out."

"Going to find out?"

"Yes; and that without delay."

"How?"

"By going to the back of the stage and asking *Mlle. Modiste* for the truth."

"And you expect her to tell you?" There was a touch of quizzical irony in the question.

"I expect her to tell me," stoutly. "First, because there is nothing in the affair of which she need be ashamed."

He glanced defiantly at the other, as though prepared to resent any expression of doubt on this score.

Caxton, however, was discreet.

"Yes," was all he said; "and secondly?"

"Secondly, because"—he hesitated a moment—"because I have the right to know."

"Ah," with comprehension, "I see! And, such being the case, you don't care for company, I fancy? All right, then, old man; off with you. But don't keep me too long on tenter-hooks. I shall be dying with curiosity until you get back."

His last words, though, were addressed to the empty air; for Laszlo had already bolted through the entrance, and was hurriedly making his way toward the stage-door.

His road thither ran through a dark, narrow passage running along the side of the theater, and littered with old boxes and barrels and discarded properties for almost every step of the way.

It would have required circumspection for a stranger to navigate his course among such a multiplicity of obstructions; but Chegnay, from meeting Muriel here on many a night, was familiar with the various pitfalls, and now engrossed in the riddle which had been presented to him for solution, threaded a path among them almost mechanically.

On he plunged, heedlessly, his eyes straight ahead, all his faculties absorbed, until the feeble gleam from the light over the stage-door was but a few feet beyond.

Then, an intuitive sixth sense warning him of danger, he half-turned, his hand instinctively seeking to draw his sword.

But with a thrill of consternation he realized that the trusted weapon no longer hung at his side. As the only alternative left him, he started to throw himself into a posture of fistic self-defense; but it was already too late, for even at that moment two men, who had crept out from among the shadows of the passageway, sprang forward and bore him to the ground.

He had time for but one smothered

exclamation; then a muffling-cloth was twisted about his head, and his hands and feet having been securely pinioned, he felt himself lifted, carried to a waiting vehicle, dumped in, and driven rapidly away.

Caxton lingered about the front of the theater long after all the audience had departed, in the hope of seeing Laszlo again; but finally gave up the expectation, and sauntered back to his hotel.

"Love's young dream is never very considerate, I guess," he smiled indulgently; "and I suppose I ought to have had better sense than to look for him to turn up, when he had the chance to play father confessor to such a charming penitent. Really, I don't believe I would have done so myself, if I had been in his shoes. Still," he mused, "that doesn't satisfy my curiosity in regard to this muddle I have stumbled upon; and, by Jove! I am going to find out about it or bust."

CHAPTER XI.

A FRIGHTFUL MISUNDERSTANDING.

"I MUST tell him. It is not fair to either of us to let this farce go on any longer."

There was a note of obstinate decision in Muriel's voice as she sat at the foot of the bed wrapped up in a kimona—a quality of settled resolution which caused Miss Van Brunt to interrupt the process of combing out her yellow locks before the mirror and turn upon her in consternation.

The heiress had dismissed her maid for the night upon an intimation from her cousin that a confidential chat was desired, and while making her bedtime toilet had listened with rapt interest and many ejaculations of sympathy to the story of Chegnay's wooing.

Now, however, at this unexpected conclusion to the narrative, this threatened disclosure—whatever it might be—she wrinkled her smooth brow into a quick frown of protest.

"But, my dear," she pleaded, "is that altogether a square deal for me? Remember, I was very dubious about going into the thing, and it was only on your solemn promise that nothing should

interfere with the arrangement for at least two months that I finally consented."

"Yes, I know; and I still stand ready to maintain absolute secrecy—except with Laszlo. What difference will telling him make, anyway? He will not betray our confidence, and it need cause no change in our compact. But just put yourself in my place, and think how you would feel. Could you go on day after day living a lie with the man you loved?"

Miss Van Brunt's expression seemed to indicate that she thought she could; but, aloud, she merely contented herself with affirming rather loftily that to her "a promise was a promise."

"Of course," she added, with a toss of her head, "you are free to do as you please; but I assure you that, if I had ever dreamed of your backing down this way right in the middle of the game, I would certainly have never yielded to your request."

"But I am not backing down," retorted gentle Muriel, with a flash of spirit; for even a worm will turn when too hard pressed. "And as for the bargain being at my request, it is true that I suggested it, but I have not forgotten that you were more than willing to accede."

"Surely you must remember that morning in Paris," she recalled resentfully, "when you found your voice had given out, and you came to me in such a panic, claiming that to forfeit this Vienna engagement would mean the shipwreck of your whole artistic career."

"Then, you will recollect that after I had been to the doctor's with you, and we learned that a two months' rest would serve to put your throat in shape, I proposed the idea of taking your place, only to have it hailed with rapture and relief."

"Nothing was said then," she concluded hotly, "about 'promises,' or 'yielding to my request.' Your only fear was that papa could not be persuaded to consent, or that the chance of somebody detecting the substitution would prove too great an objection."

The other, seeing that she had gone too far, more or less gracefully drew in her horns.

"Still, my dear," she urged, "you cannot say you were not more than eager to try it. Why, you fairly made poor uncle's

life a burden to him until you had coaxed him to agree.

"Of course, I realize," waxing even more conciliatory, "that it was a wonderful thing for me to have a cousin with voice and talent enough to take my place; but, at that, I don't consider the obligation has been entirely on the one side. Come, now; own up, girlie; you have never enjoyed an experience so much in all your life."

"Yes, that is true," acquiesced Muriel honestly. "I don't know that I should care to stay upon the stage permanently, but as an adventure it has been wholly delightful. The excitement and the success and the applause is very sweet to me, or," she paused, "has been until lately. But since I have recognized that Laszlo really loves me I have constantly been tortured with the fear that somebody would find us out and tell him before I had the chance to do so. To-night I had the feeling of apprehension on me so strong that I could hardly go through with my part."

"Yes, we have certainly been lucky," assented her cousin; "but it's just as you said when the scheme was first suggested. There are few Americans in Vienna at this time of year, and those that do come are not likely to spot the trick, since almost all of my work has been done in the Far West."

"No, dearie, you are simply getting a bit overstrained and nervous. The fact that everything has gone on so swimmingly is all the more reason to believe that it will continue to do so. Come on, pet," she cajoled, flinging her arms about the other, "promise me that you will keep our secret just a little longer."

"But why should you object to Laszlo's knowing?" protested Muriel. "Surely, you don't believe that he would betray us if I asked him not to?"

"Not intentionally, perhaps. But think what a revelation it would be to him to learn that he is going to marry Miss Van Brunt, the heiress, instead of a struggling, impecunious actress. He would hardly be human if he failed, in his elation, to whisper a hint of his good luck to some of his relatives or intimates. And then—poof!—first thing we knew, it would be all over the town."

The engaged girl refused to listen,

however. "Not Laszlo," she asserted eagerly. "My wealth will count for nothing in his eyes. Why, he quarreled with his father and resigned from his regiment only to-day because the old general insisted on his marrying money; and I only wish you could have heard how bravely and enthusiastically he talked to-night of his plans and prospects for our future.

"I am only afraid that he will find it hard to forgive the deception which has been practised upon him. Indeed, I doubt if he would forgive it, should it come to him from other lips than mine.

"No," and she shook her head obdurately, "you are asking too much. I will play out the engagement as I contracted, and I shall tell no one else; but I feel that Laszlo has the right to know."

And from this stand neither coaxing nor tears was able to move her, until at last the other, in order to gain the point, felt forced to give the real reasons for her objections.

"Well, all that I can say is that I think you are awfully selfish," she declared half-weepingly. "Nothing must interfere with the successful progress of your love-affair, whereas mine can go hang, for all you care."

"Your love-affair?"

"Of course. Is it possible you have been so wrapped up in your own concerns that you haven't noticed how matters were getting to be between me and," she gave a self-conscious blush, "Captain von Altdorff?"

"Captain von Altdorff? I should never have dreamed of such a thing. But he is so seldom around; he is always out at the arsenal, fooling around with those balloons of his. When do you see him?"

"If the mountain won't come to Mohammed, Mohammed must go to the mountain," retorted Miss Van Brunt airily. "I find it very convenient to drive out that way pretty often, and do you know, I have become awfully interested in dirigible balloons."

"And you really care for him?"

"Care for him?" Her tone was a better answer than her words.

"How about him, though? He seems so cold and dignified, and I have always heard that he was a confirmed bachelor."

"Oh, they all are confirmed bachelors,"

with a shake of the fluffy, blond locks, "until the right woman comes along. I know the signs well enough, and there is no mistake about his being head over ears in love; but he is so diffident and retiring that he hesitates to speak. He has practically to be forced to the point, and that is why I am asking you to keep silence for a few days longer with Count Chegnay."

"But how," bewilderedly, "is my telling Laszlo going to interfere with you?"

"Why, don't you see? As I told you, he is of such a peculiar temperament that he almost requires a charge of dynamite to be exploded under him; and I consequently have been compelled to screw him up to concert pitch by working upon his jealousy."

"Jealousy? But Laszlo doesn't—"

"Doesn't care anything about me? No; I am very well aware of the fact, but Von Altdorff isn't, and that makes all the difference in the world. He cannot realize, don't you know, that all men do not consider me the most desirable and attractive thing in existence; and since he comes about with us so little, it has not been hard to make him believe that Count Chegnay is also desperately smitten with my fair self."

"Oh," with indignant reproach, "and you are willing deliberately to trick him?"

"Don't look so shocked. All's fair in love or war, and it won't hurt him a bit. Of course, I shall make full confession of everything when once he has been brought to an avowal; but in the meantime, believe me, it is much better for him to squirm a bit upon the anxious seat."

Muriel was still far from approving; but she saw that it was useless to argue with her wayward cousin, and therefore merely contented herself with once more questioning how a disclosure of their true relations to Laszlo could in any way defeat the other's plans.

"Why, I should think that would be plain enough," rejoined the strategist. "Is it possible you haven't grasped that Chegnay is as jealous of Von Altdorff over you as Felix is of him about me? That was the misapprehension which brought them to the point of a duel, and which has kept them estranged ever since.

"But we must not forget that they were formerly the closest friends, and that if either of them should learn how matters really stand small time would be lost in seeking a reconciliation. And that, I fear, would mean that your little cousin and all her projects would very promptly land in the soup. No, dearest, I am sure that my way is much the better plan, and I only ask this silence for a few days longer. Felix will certainly speak soon, and then all need for our little fiction will be gone."

Her specious plea was very far from convincing Muriel, and the latter had many more protests and objections to interpose before the discussion was finished; but, like every other newly betrothed girl, she wished to see all her friends and acquaintances attain to her own happy state, and, against her better judgment, she finally consented to refrain from telling Laszlo for one more week.

"I must caution papa the first thing in the morning, however," she added, with a start of recollection; "for I spoke to him of my intention to enlighten Laszlo before I came to you. And you know how he is; unless I warn him first, he is likely to meet Laszlo somewhere and blurt out the whole thing."

As it happened, though, the conversation had continued late, and hence before either of the girls had opened her eyes in the morning old Cyrus was up and out for a ride, for he had recently taken up this form of exercise under his physician's orders, and every day his tubby figure could be seen upon a hard-paced nag jolting along through the Prater or out on some of the suburban roads.

As it happened, too, he chose that particular morning a route extending out in the direction of the arsenal, and by the same untoward chance fell in on his way back with no less a person than Captain von Altdorff, who was returning from an early inspection of his balloons.

For a time the two conversed upon indifferent subjects; but the military man, although he tried to keep up his end, showed himself strangely abstracted and ill at ease, until at last, as though seeming to reach a decision, he straightened up in his saddle and turned to his companion.

"Mr. Van Brunt," he said a little stiffly, "I may seem a trifle old-fashioned to you, but I have a liking for the more punctilious and ceremonial customs of our fathers. Therefore, sir, I am going to ask you formally for your sanction to my seeking your daughter's hand in marriage."

The millionaire was so flabbergasted for the moment that he almost tumbled out of his saddle.

In the turmoil of his thoughts, and with Muriel's intimation to him the night before fresh in his mind, he never thought of associating the request with the woman who was posing as his child.

"Why—er—" he stammered and floundered uncertainly.

But Von Altdorff, now discarding all his stiffness and reserve, had plunged into an ardent appeal for the beauty's hand, reciting his various qualifications and showing himself no whit less eager than the most impetuous boy lover.

"Do you think," he finally queried, bending forward anxiously—"do you think there is any hope for me?"

Old Cyrus felt sorry for him as he noted the stern man's agitation and earnestness; but he decided that there was nothing to gain by raising any false hopes.

"To be on the dead square with you, captain," he said firmly, "you haven't got a show. I don't know as I've got the right to tell you; but you've been a man with me, and I'll take the chance. My little girl is already bespoke to this young Count Chegnay, and, what is more, she loves him to death."

For a moment Von Altdorff grew pale as death; then a fierce gust of rage swept through him, breaking down all the barriers of his self-control and sending a tiger gleam of hate into his bloodshot eyes.

"What!" he stormed hoarsely. "She loves him! She would throw herself away and be made miserable for life by that worthless hound! Why, I saw him only last night with her cousin in his arms! He is a flirt, a despicable male coquette!

"But she shall not do it!" he cried, with increased passion. "I will prevent the sacrifice."

He threw up his hand with a sudden gesture toward heaven, as though he were

making a vow; then turned his horse with a quick jerk at the reins, and, leaping a fence, galloped madly away across the fields.

CHAPTER XII.

AN ASTOUNDING ANNOUNCEMENT.

TOM CAXTON, as he often said of himself, was never much of a hand to stick his nose into other people's business; yet he must have been more than human not to have entertained a certain degree of curiosity concerning the singular problem upon which he had so unwittingly stumbled.

And it was in a sense his own business, too, he argued; for had he not been drawn into it and persuaded to lend his aid to the maintenance of the fraud?

The more he thought over it, the more he concluded that an explanation of some kind was due him; and accordingly when he arose the following morning, it was with a very positive intention to seek Laszlo out without delay and demand a reckoning.

"I don't really believe that there's anything crooked in the deal, for all its shady appearance," he ruminated while he was shaving, "and I'm almost willing to go bail that this count fellow is all to the good; but, hang it all, a man doesn't like to be left in the dark when such interesting little developments are on the carpet—more especially when he's been worked into lending them his countenance and support.

"Of course," he admitted, "his countlets may have been flimflamming me with that ingenuous racket of his, or he may have dodged me afterward because he found out more than he had bargained for; but, whatever the trouble, he's got to open up to-day. I've got a right to be put wise; and, by Jove, I'm going to hunt him up without delay and make him do it."

Very easy to so determine in the solitude of one's chamber; but quite a different thing to carry into effect, as Mr. Caxton discovered after breakfast when he sallied out upon his search.

Not that it was particularly difficult to learn Laszlo's customary haunts. Almost every one in Vienna knew the

young Count Chegnay, he found, and could tell him where the object of his quest was most likely to be located.

But, after he had visited without result a dozen or more places to which he had been directed, he was fain to cry with the maker of the famous recipe for baked hare: "First, catch your hare!"

Neither at the barracks, the palace, the parade-ground, the clubs, the cafés, nor on the Prater, could any clue to the whereabouts of the missing lieutenant be raised. At every place he was expected—might, indeed, be in at any moment—so Caxton was told, but had not yet made his appearance.

Could it be that he was deliberately keeping out of the way? wondered the New Yorker; and with this suspicion growing stronger, he determined more stubbornly than ever that he would find his man and make him speak.

Accordingly, he stormed at length the portals of the grim old house on Schwartzenberg Platz, and, after a heated interview with old Franz at the door, finally succeeded in securing audience with the gaunt, gray general.

"I desire, Herr Count, to see your son," he demanded, meeting the other's frowning gaze unabashed. "Your servants inform me that he is not at home; but I have taken the liberty to doubt their word, and want assurance from you before I consent to leave."

The old man recoiled for just the fraction of a second, and Caxton noticed a slight contraction of the fingers of his right hand where he leaned with it upon the table for support. Then he drew himself up, and was his old, stern, impassive self again.

"This is certainly rather peremptory, Mr.—Mr. Caxton," he rejoined harshly. "I am not accustomed to having my house invaded in this fashion. Why, may I ask, do you wish to see my son?"

Caxton had by this time, as he would have expressed it, taken the old chap's measure, and had decided upon the form of appeal which he believed would be most potent.

"It is a matter of honor, sir," he said stiffly. "Your son last night induced me to lend my word to a certain matter, promising that I should have a justifiable explanation later on. Not only have I

so far failed to receive any explanation from him, but from the fact that I can find him at none of his usual resorts, I am beginning to suspect that he is purposely avoiding me. Therefore, I ask you again, sir, is he in this house?"

The father went white for a moment, then turned a deep red.

"I can assure you, sir," he said sharply, "that my son is not purposely avoiding you or any other man. If, however," almost eagerly, "you consider your honor affronted by his delay, and if you will consent to overlook my advancing years, I shall be happy personally to render you any satisfaction you require."

The American bowed coldly.

"That, my dear sir, would be out of the question," he rejoined. "I expect nothing more from you than a plain answer to my single question: Is your son in this house?"

"In this house?" The general's iron self-control suddenly gave way. "Do you not know, sir, that he left this house yesterday, swearing never willingly to enter it again? Do you not know that he would be refused admittance here, if he should come naked and starving to beg for shelter upon his bended knees? In this house, indeed! If you seek him, why do you not look for him at the theater, lolling in the wings to watch the antics of this painted hussy who has enchained his fancy, this woman from your country who—"

He choked with the vehemence of his passionate utterance, and had to subside into his chair, gasping and sputtering.

Caxton waited quietly until the paroxysm had passed.

"All this is no answer to my question, general," he said at last. "I am still waiting."

"Your question?" But the other did not raise his eyes.

"Yes; is your son in this house?"

"Sir, you are impertinent."

"Perhaps; but I intend to have an answer."

Evidently the general was considering the advisability of having this bold intruder thrown out, and Caxton speculated hurriedly as to whether it were worth while putting up a resistance; but, happily, his cool nerve carried the day, and at last the old warrior succumbed.

"No," he growled, as though the very fact of having been forced to the admission made the words stick in his throat. "No, my son is not in this house. Now, if you are satisfied, will you kindly leave me in peace?"

"With the utmost pleasure."

Airily, and head erect, the American marched out of the room and down the steps. As old Franz opened the front door for him, however, he thought—whether it were fancy or fact, he could not quite be certain—that the aged servitor lingering unnecessarily long over the bolts, tried to give him some signal or veiled intimation; but if so, it was cut short by a sharp, strident summons from up-stairs, and immediately he was in the street with the heavy door closed behind him.

A moment's reflection, too, convinced him that he must have been mistaken; for what on earth would this old retainer have had to communicate to him? So, deciding that he had merely misconstrued some halting movement into the supposedly significant gesture, he stuffed his hands into his pockets and strolled off down the sidewalk.

"Gay old tomb, that," he commented lightly; "and such an affable ruffian, the old count. No wonder my disappearing young acquaintance shook the dust off his feet in favor of his Muriel—or whatever her name may be."

Then he forgot all about the house in Schwartzenberg Platz and his surly reception, and devoted himself with renewed vigor to his search.

But high or low, near or far, nowhere that he looked could he find any trace of Chegnay, or learn of his having been seen.

It must have been along about four o'clock, while still pursuing his fruitless quest, that he happened just in front of the Burg Theater to run into Max Horowitz, his eyes bulging and his air big with importance.

"Hi, there!" hailed the little hussar excitedly. "You will be interested in this. Have you heard the news yet? But no, of course you haven't. I just now learned it myself."

"News!" growled the American. "No, I have heard none, and I guess the only news I care to hear is about

your friend, Count Chegnay. Can you tell me where he may be found?"

"He—he," giggled the gossip delightedly. "That is certainly good. The only news he cares to hear is about the Count Chegnay, and he wants to know where Laszlo may be found. Yes, it is assuredly to laugh!"

"It'll be to laugh on the other side of your mouth, if you don't quit that insane cackling and give me a straight answer, you grinning monkey," thought Caxton, surveying the fellow with small favor.

Aloud, however, he merely repeated his question, with perhaps a shade of added emphasis.

"Yes. I wish to see the lieutenant. Can you tell me where he may be found?"

Horowitz was once more overcome with amusement; but at last he managed to gasp out amid his chuckles: "Where he may be found? Oh, but that is good! Ho, ho! Where he may be found?"

"Yes, where he may be found," speaking now with exasperation.

"Ah, *mein Herr*, but that is what everybody else is asking. We know that he has gone; but—"

"Gone? Gone where?"

The answer was an expressive shrug of the shoulders.

"When one leaves on certain errands, *mein Herr*, one does not usually give out his destination. And our dear Laszlo is clever. Yes, undoubtedly clever. Why, he fooled even me."

But Caxton was growing tired of this beating about the bush.

"Look here," he said, seizing the other by the shoulder, "suppose we get down to business. Now tell me, in so many words, what is it that Chegnay has done?"

"Why, as I was telling you, he has fooled us all. He has pretended throughout to be in love with the actress."

"Yes?"

"And now, *mein Herr*, now he has suddenly eloped with her cousin, the heiress, Miss Van Brunt."

There was a gasp behind them which caused Caxton to turn suddenly and leap forward, just in time to catch Muriel in his arms as she swooned toward the ground.

Coming out from a rehearsal at the theater, she had appeared upon the scene at the very moment of Horowitz's revelation!

(To be continued.)

HIS FRANTIC CHASE.

By ROBERT RUSSELL.

What happened after the tall man, peddling hair-restorer, left the branch bank without making a sale.

IT was probably the smallest banking establishment in the world, this Hermon National Bank. Not in the matter of capital or deposits, but in the size of the floor space.

There was the main room, perhaps ten feet by ten, and then the office in which John Black now sat, separated from the ten-by-ten apartment by a brass railing and a glass partition, cut into which was the window bearing the sign "Cashier."

John was cashier of the institution, besides being teller, bookkeeper, office-boy, and the other officers of the establishment. It was only a branch of

a larger institution, and the directors of the main bank, having the greatest confidence in the young man, had determined that Black could take care of all the business which this little town of a thousand inhabitants would afford.

And attend to it he did. When he went out for his dinner the bank was closed, and it was rare that the young man found an anxious crowd of would-be depositors awaiting his return.

The size of the place has little to do with this story, except to accentuate the fact that when the Hon. Bascom Jenkins entered the room, carrying with him all

of his two hundred and fifty pounds of flesh, it created considerable commotion in the atmosphere and brought the young banker to his feet in a moment.

"Good day, John," said the Hon. Bascom.

"Good day, sir," replied the young man.

"I wish to confer with you," continued the older man, "on a matter of some importance."

John opened the door of the partition and allowed his well-known visitor to enter the sacred precincts where, to tell the truth, most of John's callers were received.

"As you know," continued Jenkins, seating himself in the most comfortable of the two chairs in evidence, "I am the executor of your late grandmother's estate. And, as you probably also know, she made a gift to you of whose character I am ignorant. The time has come, however, at which, under the terms of her instructions given me, I am to present to you the envelope containing said gift. I have it here, sealed as it came into my possession, and I now hand it over to you with the wish that you make good use of whatever it contains."

John Black took the envelope and gazed at the outside much in the same manner as one does who receives a letter addressed in a strange hand, and wonders from whom it can have come before investigating.

"At your convenience," resumed the Hon. Bascom, "you will undoubtedly gratify my pardonable curiosity and let me know what the envelope contains. Now, I will leave you to the perusal of the probable missive which accompanied the gift."

With that the ponderous gentleman took his leave, after receiving the proper words of thanks from John.

Alone in the little bank, the young man lost no time in opening the envelope to ascertain what his grandmother had left him, but his highest expectations did not do justice to the fact. In the silence of the place he first removed from the package a letter written in her well-known hand, which ran as follows:

I am leaving you the greatest gift in my power to bestow—the recipe for the medicine which has allowed me to live

in comparative luxury since my husband's death. As you know, no one in the world knows this recipe or prescription except myself, and now I pass it on to you. I have always prepared the compound myself, being contented with the modest sum which it brought. With your knowledge of business, however, and considering the reputation the medicine has gained, you will undoubtedly be able to make many times the sum of money it has won for me.

For your guidance, I will tell you that the great drug-house of Corten & Co. has tried for many years to get me to allow them to put up the medicine, giving me a certain portion of the price paid for each bottle sold, but I have always refused. I would advise you to communicate with them at once, and they will make a good arrangement with you.

The letter closed with the expression of a hope that John would use the prescription for the good of humanity, and never allow business wisdom to rule him entirely.

John now took from the envelope the prescription which was to mean so much to him. There was no joke about the thing, for the name of "Brandon's Compound" was a family term, not only throughout the neighborhood where his grandmother had lived, but all over the country. John Black knew that he could sell the prescription he held in his hands for more money than he had ever dreamed of possessing. He also knew that if it were properly placed on the market he would become in time a millionaire.

The writing on the prescription was rather faint, and after the young man had spent some time in contemplating his good fortune he determined that the first thing to do was to make a copy of the important paper; the second to communicate with Corten & Co., and ascertain on what terms they would manufacture the remedy.

On his typewriter he would transcribe it, making one copy to keep, and sending the other to the drug-house, after he had ascertained their terms.

Excited by the prospect of approaching wealth, John took his seat before the machine, which occupied a prominent place in his office, inserted two sheets of

paper in the typewriter with the necessary carbon between them, and carefully began to copy the prescription which would mean affluence to him.

The words were unfamiliar to Black, but the writing was plain, and in the course of half an hour he had the thing copied. But he must not destroy the original; it might be of value hereafter.

Taking a large linen envelope from a drawer of his desk, John placed it in the original prescription, and then sat for a moment contemplating the copy still sticking from the typewriter before him.

He was still engaged in his day-dream of wealth—and there was no reason why he should not be confident of it—when the bank door opened and a man whom John had never seen entered.

With his usual anxiety to attend to the business of those in whose employ he was Black rose and looked through the cashier's window.

"What can I do for you, sir," he said to the stranger.

The tall, black-haired man who had entered peered at John through the opening in the partition and laughed.

"I don't want to deposit a million dollars, or get you to cash a check," he began. "I want to sell you something."

"You've come to the wrong place," returned Black.

"The wrong place for some is the right place for others," replied the tall man good-humoredly. "Are you so busy that you won't let me talk to you a minute?"

"Certainly not," said John, remembering two things, first, that he had become possessed of great wealth during the last half hour; second, that he always carried during banking hours a small revolver in his hip-pocket. And so, with the confidence of a young fellow of great strength, he showed the tall man to the chair lately occupied by the Hon. Bascom Jenkins.

"And now that I am comfortable," began the stranger, "I'll tell you what I want to sell. I have no patience with those agents who worm their way into a man's office under false pretenses—I always say I am an agent out to sell something. Have you a match—and do you mind if I smoke?"

"Certainly, sir," replied John—and then the thought came to him of the

prescription still remaining in the typewriter.

Of course this man would know nothing of its value, but Black felt that he would be on the safe side if he removed the valuable paper and put it in a secure place. Already he had inserted the original prescription in an envelope and would it not be wiser to place the copies he had made there also and put the envelope in a safe place?

Even if the man had noticed the paper sticking out of the typewriter, he could have learned nothing as yet.

And so John, with a *sang froid* unusual in one of his training, produced a match for his visitor, and while the stranger was lighting a very long, black cigar, the young man leaned with his back against the typewriter, withdrew without looking at it the paper which meant his fortune, reached for the envelope containing the original prescription, and enclosed both in the same package.

This done he casually sealed the envelope and stood waiting for his visitor to resume.

"As I was saying," continued the tall man, "it is noon of a Saturday, and—"

But this remark brought John to a realization of the situation. Methodical and conscientious, he had never failed to close the bank at noon on Saturdays, and nothing would allow him to fail in his duty to his employers.

"Just a moment, sir," he said. "I must close up now. We can talk afterward in here, but I must lock the safe and draw the curtains."

Without more ado the young man crossed the floor to the door, locked it, and returned to the inner office where the tall man sat puffing his cigar. John's next duty was to put the available cash away.

Confident of his strength, fortified by the knowledge that a revolver reposed in his pocket, Black took the money from the drawer and approached the safe. Depositing the cash in its proper receptacle, he looked blankly at the large envelope which still remained in his hand. The prescription! Where could he leave it over Sunday? There was but one answer. The safe of the bank. And so into the safe went his fortune, and in a

few minutes the great vault was locked with a time-lock which prevented any one from opening it until nine o'clock Monday morning.

Then, with a free mind, John turned to finish his conversation with the tall man.

"As you are through with your labors," said that worthy, "I will now tell you what I want to sell. I see that you, though a young man, are suffering from the first symptoms of baldness. Now, I have a hair-restorer here which the greatest drug-house in America recommends, and I want you to buy some of it."

It did not take John long to persuade his caller that he had no intention of investing in such a remedy, and it was with mutual good nature that they parted. As the tall man was leaving, he turned to Black and said with considerable meaning:

"I've learned a great deal from you, young man, and I want you to take my card. Good day."

Laughing to himself, John threw the card carelessly aside as he turned to his books to balance them for the week.

It was not until some hours had elapsed and his work was finished that Black thought again of his visitor. And in this connection he remarked to himself on the coincidence which had given him a fortune to come to him through drugs and had brought him a visitor whose interest lay in the same direction.

Then a sudden thought struck him. As plainly as though he was going through the operation at this moment, he felt that he was again putting the valuable prescription away in the safe.

Now he remembered the feeling of the paper. When he had sat down to make a copy of his grandmother's gift he knew that he had placed two sheets of paper in the machine with a carbon between them. And now he recalled the feeling of the paper he had put away in the safe. *There had been but one sheet!*

The original was already in the envelope he knew, but he had only added one other sheet when he had locked the package up in the safe.

Hastily he turned to the typewriter. There was no copy there—and yet he knew that he had made a copy.

It *must* be somewhere in the office! There had been no one there except his agent friend, the tall man who had tried to sell him the hair tonic. But no copy of the prescription was to be seen, look as he might. Sheets of paper scattered over the floor there were, but none bearing the all-important recipe.

Absent-mindedly John picked up the stranger's card. "Corton & Co." it read. Where had he heard that name? Yes, his grandmother's letter. That was the firm which had been trying to buy the prescription from the old lady for so many years. And now John remembered that he had left the stranger, representing this firm, alone in the office while he had locked up and closed the safe.

There was no doubt about it. The tall man had abstracted the copy of the prescription from the typewriter during those few moments—he had undoubtedly been sent to this town for that very purpose, having heard of the relationship.

And then John became suspicious of his own suspicions. It could not be possible—but what other explanation was there?

He absolutely *knew* that he had made a copy of the prescription. He absolutely *knew* that he had placed but one copy in the safe. He absolutely *knew* that the safe must remain closed, on account of its time-lock, until Monday. He absolutely *knew* that the prescription had been stolen and that by Monday morning, when he would be able to get at his copy, the person who had possession of the other copy, would undoubtedly have begun the manufacture of the medicine and his own fortune would be lost.

There was but one thing to do; find the tall man and, by sheer strength, if nothing else would prevail, obtain possession of the copy which was rightfully his.

Several hours had elapsed since the fellow had gone, but John was not to be daunted by anything like that, and it was a very determined young man who left the little bank on the trail of a tall, good-looking stranger.

As it was now late in the afternoon and the nearest railroad was some ten miles away, Black felt certain that the tall man would still be in town, and his

first thought was of the Hermon House, where the loungers had undoubtedly noticed the man and could tell him whether he was still there. To the old hostelry, accordingly, he went, and hurried to the desk to make his inquiries.

"Have you seen a tall, black-haired man, carrying a dress-suit case—and is he still here?" John asked anxiously of the clerk.

"Let me see, John," began the ponderous man in charge, as his slow brain began to take action.

"I heve," interrupted Si Jordan, owner of the Hermon Boarding and Livery Stable, who was at that moment leaning on the desk at which John stood. "Hired out a team of horses to him 'bout two hours ago. Wanted ter drive ter th' Junction to catch th' night train."

"So he has gone!" ejaculated John in dismay.

"Yep. Bill druve him—why?" And old Si looked inquiringly at the young man.

"Well," responded Black, determined to let nothing stand in the way of overtaking the man before he could make use of the valuable prescription, "I want to follow him. Can you drive me to the Junction at once, Si? We can get there in an hour and a half, and perhaps before that night train leaves."

"Sartin I kin," responded the livery man, anxious to earn the extra three dollars. "I'll hitch right up."

It was but a short time before Black, accompanied by Si, was driving at a fast gait down the State road in the direction of the Junction, John's mind full of the loss he was in danger of sustaining, Si's of curiosity which he hardly dared to voice.

At last the town was reached after what seemed to the anxious young man an interminable journey. Almost before the horses had come to a stop, he was out of the buggy and rushing frantically into the office of the main hotel in the place.

"Has the night train left?" he cried to the proprietor behind the desk.

"Yes, sir," responded that worthy.

Again dismay penetrated the young man's soul.

"I don't suppose," he said in hopelessness, "that you noticed a tall, black-

haired man—selling hair-restorer—get into your bus to take that train?"

"As a matter of fact, I did," replied the proprietor. "We had quite a conversation, and he seemed in excellent spirits."

Hope leaped once more into John's heart.

"He didn't tell you his destination, did he?"

"Sure thing," was the comforting rejoinder. "Said he was going to Carltown for over Sunday, and then on to New York by the morning train. Nice feller."

Once more John's determination was quickly formed, and he turned to Si, who had attended to the horses and was now quite an interested listener to the colloquy.

"Say, Si," said John, "Carltown is only thirty miles away. I want to get there. The last train has gone. Will you hitch up again after the horses have had something to eat and drive me over to-night?"

"Sartin," replied Si. "Them nags can do their forty miles a day every day in the week."

And so, after the animals, human as well as brute, had sustained themselves with supper, Si and John again took to the road, and had it not been for Black's keen anxiety, the drive of over thirty miles would have been far from unpleasant.

It was nearly midnight when the pair pulled up at the door of the Carltown House, gave the team to a sleepy porter, and entered to obtain lodgings. John could get no information from the night-clerk, who explained that he had just come on, and had seen no tall, black-haired man; but as there was nothing to do but rely on the information he had received from the proprietor of the hotel at the Junction, Black went to his room determined at least to get a good night's rest.

But he was up bright and early in the morning, and again making inquiries of the clerk. Yes, such a man had come there the afternoon previous on the train from the Junction, had breakfasted at a very early hour that morning, and gone out, saying that he would return and occupy his room again that night.

Third period of dismay for the young man!

There seemed to be nothing to do but wait here in the hotel with his eyes on the door, in the hope that the tall man would return.

"If you see him," said John to the clerk, "before I do, be sure and let me know." And he took a comfortable chair in the office.

Never had Black passed such a long day. As the hours dragged on, and lunch-time passed without sight of the man he sought, even Si's interesting yarns failed to amuse him. His anxiety was accentuated by the recollection that he would have to drive back to his home at Hermon that night at the latest, as the bank *must* be opened by nine o'clock in the morning.

This achievement was possible, as the three towns—Hermon, the Junction, and Carltown—formed a triangle, and it was not more than twenty miles across country to John's home.

Si and Black had taken their supper, and were discussing how much longer they could wait, when the former grasped John's arm.

"*Thar he is,*" whispered Si.

With a profound thankfulness, John looked up at the tall, black-haired man just entering the hotel and whom Si indicated with a soiled finger. But, oh, the pity of it!

It was not the tall man for whom he was looking.

"Is—is that the man we have been chasing—the man who drove from Hermon to-day?"

"Sure," answered Si. "Ain't he the feller yer want?"

"Hitch up the horses, Si," moaned John. "We'll get back at once to Hermon."

Not a word was spoken on the return trip. John could not be severe with the old man when he remembered how hurriedly he had made up his mind that the tall man described by Si must be the man he was looking for. He was only tired and hopeless after his useless journey.

As he crawled into bed that night, all visions of wealth had left him, for he had come to the conclusion that his drug acquaintance was by this time far away

with the precious prescription in his pocket.

In the morning the same feeling of depression was upon him as he unlocked the bank, a little before nine o'clock, and entered his small office. At any rate, the time-lock on the safe would open in a few moments, and he could have the pleasure of again looking upon the prescription, even though it might now be worthless to him.

At last the hour of nine arrived, and John unlocked the safe. First taking out the cash which he kept each day in the smaller safe near the cashier's window, he then drew out the large envelope containing the prescription and gazed thoughtfully at it.

His meditations were interrupted by the opening of the door, and there entered—the man he had been looking for, the tall man with black hair.

Dropping the important envelope to the floor, John was through the door of the partition in a moment.

"Give me that prescription you stole," he cried, grasping the tall man by the arm.

"What are you talking about?"

"The prescription—the prescription!"

"My dear young man, I have no prescription—I just called, after a very pleasant Sunday in your town, to say good-by, and see if you hadn't changed your mind about buying some hair-restorer."

The evident sincerity of the man impressed Black, and with a last despairing hope he reentered the office, picked up the envelope from the floor, and slowly opened it. Yes—there was the original prescription in his grandmother's handwriting, and one of the copies he had made—but—

Turning the copy over in his hand, the young man stood aghast. The paper was plain enough on its face—and there—on the back of the sheet *was the other copy*.

"I—I—made two copies on the same sheet," he muttered. "Put the carbon paper in wrong side up."

Turning to the tall stranger, John Black spoke slowly.

"I guess," he said—"I guess I have changed my mind. I'll take a *case* of your hair-restorer."

TROUBLE IN BUNCHES.*

By SEWARD W. HOPKINS,

Author of "By Bullet Persuasion," "Taking Big Chances," "The Hoodoo Ranch," etc.

A matter of one American obliging another starts with a mistake,
opening the way to crimes, casualties, and catastrophes galore.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

ROBERT FRASER, a young American doctor who is stopping at the town of Santa Rosa, in South America, is persuaded by a fellow countryman, Jim Balover, to aid his elopement with Isobel Fernandez, the daughter of old Don Manuel Fernandez, Santa Rosa's wealthy banker.

Arriving at a deserted *casa*, where Balover is to meet him, Fraser finds, to his consternation, that he has made off not with the *señorita*, but her cousin, Miss Kate Arnold, of New York, who has been turned out of Don Manuel's house for taking Isobel's part in her love-affair.

Balover arrives with the news that Manuel has disappeared; that Henrique, of the inn, has been stabbed and robbed, and that orders are posted in the town to shoot either himself or Fraser on sight. Mary O'Donnell, Miss Arnold's maid, slips away from the party after inquiring directions to the source of the Rio Rico, which she declares to be a magic spring; and Fraser, fearing she will get into danger in the mountains, starts in pursuit. He is held up by some ruffians and led off into the forest.

CHAPTER VIII.

WITH THE BANDITS.

I DID not see what had been done with the horse I had been riding. My captors were, by no means, considerate of my physical welfare. They jostled me and hustled me along over the rough ground, and those in the rear added to the amusement of the rest by jabbing me occasionally with the point of a dagger or an old bayonet to accelerate my footsteps.

"I think you are mistaken," I said, as we stumbled along, the ground getting rougher at every step. "If you have been waiting for some one, it is not I."

"We wait for everybody," was the reply from the leader.

Bursting at last from the thicket, we came out into a small space, where there were few trees but an immense number of large boulders scattered or piled promiscuously, as though in some remote period of the past an attempt had been made to build a fortress there out of the large stones.

As a matter of fact, it was quite a respectable fastness now. A small force,

well armed, could here keep a regiment at bay.

Sitting or lolling about, smoking or playing cards, were about a dozen more men of the same hue as to complexion, and the same as to clothing as those who had captured me. I will not say they were all dressed the same. I doubt if there were any two rigged out just alike.

Some had sashes which might have been bright in color once upon a time, but now were soiled with grease and dirt; some had shoes, some slippers. Some had broad-brimmed hats, some none at all.

It was the most picturesque and most disreputable lot of tatterdemalions I had ever seen congregated in one spot in my life. Those engaged in playing cards merely glanced at me as I was guided into the camp. But here I met with a shock that drove from me temporarily all the interest I had felt in my captors.

Fastened with ropes attached to his ankles and wrists, and sitting with his back to a big boulder, was Don Manuel Fernandez, the great banker of Santa Rosa.

He looked at me, and I looked at him.

"You—I have seen your face—you

* Began February ARGOSY. Single copies, 10 cents.

are not a native of Santa Rosa," he said. "Have you come to rescue me?"

"I would if I could, Don Manuel," I answered. "Unfortunately, I am a prisoner myself. Who are these men?"

"Hold your tongue," was the command of the leader. "If there is information to be given we will give it. Answer my questions truthfully or we will kill you. You are from Santa Rosa?"

"I left Santa Rosa last night," I answered.

"Tell us the condition of affairs there. Has Don Manuel been missed?"

"He has. I understand the entire army is searching for him."

"And you—you are a spy of that army, and were coming here. Is that not true?"

"It is not. I had no idea where Don Manuel was secreted."

"It seems—I think I know that voice," said Don Manuel. "I beseech you, permit me to talk to this man. You may add to the ransom if you will."

"Go ahead," replied the leader.

"But, Pedro," objected one of the others, "how do we know who this fellow may be?"

"Well," replied Pedro, "we will learn from Don Manuel."

"Your voice is familiar," went on Don Manuel to me. "And I seem also to remember your face. Are you not—ah! I have it. You are the American doctor who brought me letters of credit from New York?"

"I am," I said.

I did not know how much Don Manuel knew. I was in a quandary as to how much I should admit.

"But—I do not understand this disguise. If you chose to wear the costume of our country you surely could obtain better garments than those."

"I shall do so."

"Tell me, is Santa Rosa stirred up very much concerning my sudden disappearance?" he asked.

"I understand it is, very much."

"Tell me, what do they say?"

"They say—why, to the best of my knowledge, they accuse me of carrying you off."

"You! That is preposterous, *señor*. I will explain to you what happened. Last evening was an eventful one. There

is a young American, one of your countrymen, but one I did not like, who fell in love with my daughter Isobel. I ordered him from my house, and the *alcalde* ordered him from Santa Rosa."

"I know that," I said. "I saw the order."

"And last evening I was to send my daughter away on a Spanish ship. And there was also in my house another young woman. She is a daughter of my wife's sister, who married a wealthy man of New York. Well, this young woman has American ideas, and she became so impudent concerning my daughter's affairs that I sent her home. I escorted her and her maid, a loud-voiced young Irish-woman, to the carriage. I found my own coachman drunk, and hired another to drive her to the railroad station, after which he was to return and convey my daughter and myself to the quay."

"The carriage started, and I stood watching it, when several men attacked me, blindfolded me, stifled my cries, and carried me away. I was brought here. I do not even know where this place is, except that it is somewhere in the Sierras. These fellows are mountain bandits. They demand for my restoration to liberty a large amount in gold."

"Which you will not pay?" I interposed.

"Which I must pay. If I refuse I shall never see Santa Rosa again. My business is large, and demands my presence."

While we were carrying on this conversation an independent line of reasoning was passing through my brain.

I might, if alone with Don Manuel, tell him the truth. But to tell him there, with that gang of ragged cutthroats to hear, that Kate Arnold and Balover were in the ruined *casa*, would simply be to send half a dozen of them off to find fresh victims. So I said nothing.

"Well," demanded the fellow called Pedro, "have you talked enough? What good is all this? What we want is the money? I have thought of a plan."

"Well, what good is it if you only think it?" asked one of his miserable crowd. "What we want is money. Speak what you have thought."

"We have decided that not one of us dare go to Santa Rosa and to the bank to

obtain the money," explained Pedro. "And here comes to our assistance a man known to Don Manuel, an American, who can go to the bank and get the money on Don Manuel's order. To save his own life he will do that."

"Will you go for me?" asked Don Manuel.

"And do you intend willingly to pay what they demand?"

"Better be a few thousand pesos poorer than dead," replied Don Manuel bitterly. "I will write the order. You go to my bank in Santa Rosa. Get the money and bring it here. Don't forget to bring it here."

As he said this he shot a peculiar glance from his eyes into mine.

Intuitively I knew what he meant. I was, instead of bringing money for his ransom, to guide to his rescue the soldiers of Santa Rosa.

This would have been easily accomplished had the circumstances been limited to the captivity of Don Manuel. But with orders going through the towns to shoot me on sight, the prospects of a happy conclusion were far from bright.

I spent a moment thinking it over.

"Well," I said, "if you insist on paying the ransom, write your order. I will go to Santa Rosa and get the money. Meantime, let me have something to eat. I have had no breakfast."

"Certainly, *señor*," answered Pedro. "We do not starve our—our friends."

CHAPTER IX.

A MESSENGER FOR RANSOM.

ALTHOUGH ragged and not overclean, the gang of rogues who had taken Don Fernandez and myself prisoners did not go hungry. They had undoubtedly levied heavily upon the country round about, for the meal to which I sat down, served on a stone though it was, well repaid me for my morning fast.

The members of the band lolled around, watching me eat.

"It is well you are young," said Don Manuel, looking at me in surprise, "or you would not be able to eat such a meal, knowing it may be the last of which you will ever partake."

"As to that," I answered, assuming a

coolness I was far from feeling, "all the more reason, *señor*, for eating plenty."

A buzz of complimentary words went round.

"Well," said Pedro, "if the *señor* has eaten sufficient, it will be time for him to start for Santa Rosa. We are in need of the money from the bank of Don Manuel, and it is dangerous to remain here."

"I am ready to go," I replied. "There remain but two things—no, three. I have not yet received the order from Don Manuel, and I must have the horse you took from me. The third matter is that I must have a change of clothing."

"It seems you have already made a change from your own to ours," remarked Pedro.

"True. But since I put on this outfit, things have happened in Santa Rosa that make it dangerous for me to appear as I am."

"But listen, *Americano*," said Pedro, a dark look resting on his countenance. "We are trusting you more than we would one of our own people. How do we know that you will return?"

"I am an American, and my word is good," I said. "I surely would not run away and leave Don Manuel to his fate."

"And you will not bring the soldiers?"

"I shall do as Don Manuel requests."

"Return at once with—the money," said Don Manuel, and again that peculiar, meaning flash of intelligence shot from his eyes into mine.

I knew that Don Manuel was very rich, but I also knew that he was very penurious. There was little doubt in my mind as to what he wanted me to do.

He had no intention of paying into the hands of these brigands a large amount of gold for his liberty. He knew that a word would bring the soldiers to the stronghold, and, even though the ragged robbers fought, they would have no chance against the armed forces of Santa Rosa.

But, though I was perfectly willing to turn traitor to this gang who, I knew, would not hesitate to commit murder or any other atrocity, there was a difficulty. The soldiers wanted me.

I had no desire to be arrested and shot, even to set Don Manuel at liberty.

"I will return," I said, "with the money. But, as I said before, I must have another disguise. If the soldiers recognize me on the streets of Santa Rosa, I cannot return."

"Come with me," said Pedro.

He turned his back upon his followers, none of whom took a step to join him. I followed him. He led me to a spot some distance from the camp, where there was a large tree, dead—probably blasted by lightning. Near the foot of the large trunk I saw an opening.

"This," explained Pedro, "is my safe. Not one of my men would dare touch it."

He thrust his hand into the opening, and drew out a small iron-bound wooden chest. This was locked, and from the pocket of his ragged trousers he drew a key.

Unlocking the chest and opening it, he fairly took my breath away. Piece by piece, he lifted out a gorgeous uniform.

"This is not quite what is worn today on the Atlantic coast," he said with a grin, "but it was the uniform of a great officer of Portugal at one time."

"Not very long ago," I answered. "I have seen similar ones. What became of the owner?"

Pedro looked at me steadfastly.

"He did not keep his word with us," he said, with plenty of meaning in the tones.

I soon exchanged the unkempt clothing I had on for the uniform. It fitted me fairly well.

"You are now," he announced with his eternal grin, "a great officer. You will have no difficulty at the bank. You will have *much* difficulty after you leave the bank if you do not hurry back to us, or if you notify the *alcalde*. I saw the look Don Manuel gave you. He is a treacherous old scoundrel. I warn you. We have men in Santa Rosa, as well as in the mountains. If you do not keep to the agreement between us, you will not live to see another day."

"But what about me after I return?" I asked. "I have little money—just enough to pay my expenses here. What about myself after I return with the money?"

"You are an *Americano*. We have no wish to call your battle-ships down here. We have seen them. One of your ships would destroy Santa Rosa in ten minutes. Return with the money from Don Manuel's bank, and you shall go free. Keep your word with me. I will keep mine with you."

There was something about the fellow that made me, in spite of his evil looks, believe him. We returned to the camp. The change in my appearance did not seem to affect anybody but Don Manuel. He stared.

"So! Then my friend the lieutenant did not—"

"Shut up," said Pedro insolently.

While I had been with Pedro, making the exchange of clothing, Don Manuel had been writing. He held a folded paper in his hand.

"Señor Fraser," he said, "this is an order on my bank at Santa Rosa for the sum demanded by these men. Hurry and bring it back. I am eager to return."

"And we are in a hurry to be off," added Pedro. "And you, no doubt, are as anxious to be at your own business. There are three reasons for you to hurry."

The chief himself led me out of the labyrinth of rocks and trees, and I found that my horse, or, rather, Don Manuel's horse, had not been ridden away.

"From the time you enter Santa Rosa," said Pedro, "the eyes of some of our men will be on you. So try no tricks."

I did not know whether he told the truth or not. Certainly, I was not anxious enough to meet the soldiery to try any tricks. It would be trick enough to make my way to the bank and back again with a whole skin.

I galloped away, feeling rather queer in my gorgeous uniform, and resolved to stop on my way at the old ruin and see how Miss Arnold and Balover were getting on.

It did not take me very long to reach it. The carriage of Don Manuel was there where I had left it. I did not see Balover's horse.

"Ho-ho! in there, Balover," I shouted.

There was no answer.

I dismounted and rushed inside the ruin. There I found the remnants of

a breakfast. Balover had turned butcher, and had cut up the sheep in one of the rear rooms, and he had evidently cleaned away the *débris* from the great fireplace, for there were the still warm embers, and the odor of cooking mutton clung to the air in the room. But there was no trace of either Balover or Miss Arnold.

A wild sort of fear clutched at my heart. There was but one thing I could imagine as having happened them.

They had been discovered by the searching soldiers and lugged back to Santa Rosa. And by this time I had no doubt poor Balover was shot.

CHAPTER X.

ANOTHER SURPRISE.

It needs no telling that, as I resumed the saddle and went on my way toward Santa Rosa, my feelings were anything but cheerful. If Balover and Miss Arnold had been captured and returned to Santa Rosa, the soldiers would undoubtedly be still more keen in the hunt for me, knowing that I would not be likely, as an American, to desert an American girl in distress.

As I approached the town I tried to assume an easy, careless manner. Then I came to a sudden halt, struck by an almost overwhelming thought.

I was riding one of Don Manuel's horses, and the team was known to every man, woman, and child, white, black, or between, in Santa Rosa.

My uniform might disguise me, but surely they would recognize the horse, and there would be the end of the matter as far as I was concerned, except for the mere formality of pulling a few triggers and then dumping me into a grave.

My adventure had done something toward sharpening my wits. I looked all around, to make sure that no one was near, and then dismounting, I led the horse into a small but thick coppice, where I tied him to a tree. I hoped to find him there when I returned.

I walked rapidly into Santa Rosa, and saw signs of excitement at once. People stood in groups on corners. This, of course, was not unusual, but soldiers were intermingling with them, and that was something I had not seen before.

They eyed me curiously as I strode along, but the uniform and the rank it displayed kept them from stopping me.

And then another idea struck me. I had ample time to reach the bank. I resolved to stop at the house of Don Manuel and tell the *Señorita* Isobel that when I left the ruin her lover was safe, but slightly wounded.

I turned my steps toward the banker's house, and before I reached it had come to the conclusion it was better to say nothing about the wound. It might worry the girl, and she had plenty to worry about as it was.

Furthermore, I was curious to see the girl over whom all this turmoil had been kicked up by my own blunder.

I gave the customary knock on the door, and a servant opened it. He started a little when he saw the uniform. But as I had never entered the house he could not suspect anything.

"Is Don Manuel Fernandez at home?" I began as a blind.

"Alas! Don Manuel is not at home. He disappeared last night and we do not know what has become of him. The *alcalde* has every soldier out searching for him, as well as the police."

"You cause me great alarm," I said. "I have a very important message for Don Manuel. But perhaps the *señorita* is at home."

"Not so," replied the servant, shaking his head solemnly. "Bad luck has descended upon the house. *Señorita* Isobel disappeared almost at the same time as her father."

Here was news that made me give a start.

"But, surely," I said in desperation, "there must be some explanation."

"There is none, I tell you," the fellow answered angrily. "I will tell you this. The captain of the *Cristobel* is almost crazy about the matter. Last night the *señorita* was to leave on the *Cristobel* for Spain. Her cousin from New York went—or started for the railway station in the carriage. Don Manuel went to the station—or started, we suppose. They did not get there. And the *señorita* has not been seen, nor has she been to the *Cristobel*. Oh, this is a pretty town now. All Santa Rosa is searching for two rascally Americans who did it all."

"I regret this exceedingly," I said. "I will come at a later date and will find, perhaps, the matter is not as bad as is feared."

As I walked on to the bank I had something new to ponder over. Where was Isobel?

Had her disappearance anything to do with the disappearance of Balover and Kate Arnold from the old *casa*?

Had she started out on her own hook to find them, and hit upon the spot with greater shrewdness than the soldiers?

Had some one run away with her as they had with Don Manuel? Or, had she run away herself?

I found no satisfactory answers in my mind, and soon reached the bank.

I at once gained the attention and obsequious services of the employees, and was ushered into the presence of the official next in rank to Don Manuel himself. I found him to be a calm, impassive man, shrewd-looking and courteous.

"To what good fortune do I owe this visit, *señor*?" he asked, after he had offered me a chair.

"I come from Don Manuel Fernandez, *señor*," I replied.

He started.

"Then—Don Manuel is safe? You know where he is?"

"I have but recently left him. He is well, and will probably be in his office here to-morrow morning. He is now with friends, and has taken up a project that requires a large amount of money immediately. Afraid to trust a servant, he has requested me to come to you with this."

I handed him the order Don Manuel had written. He read it carefully, and looked at me sharply.

His cold gray eyes rested on my face for about two minutes before he spoke.

"This is certainly Don Manuel's handwriting," he said. "But he is not in the habit of making such large personal demands so suddenly. There is no question that the signature is genuine. I will give you the money. The amount is large, however, and I will ask you to sign a receipt for it."

He wrote the form of a receipt and shoved it toward me.

"Be kind enough to sign, and I will give you the money."

Here I was certainly stuck, and stuck bad. I had never thought of being requested to sign any name. I had not even given a name a thought.

He saw me hesitate. A grim sort of smile crossed his face. He stepped to the door of his office and carefully closed it. Then he resumed his seat.

"You need not be afraid to sign, *Señor Fraser*," he said as coolly as he had spoken before. "I merely wanted your receipt to get your signature and compare it with those you have already signed here. Your disguise may deceive some people, but not me. Your face is not one that a man accustomed to studying faces could easily forget."

"There is something in all this that needs explaining. I am not throwing doubts upon you, but this disguise, and this order following the disappearance of Don Manuel, looks very much like a piece of blackmail. It is known that you took him away with the American girl."

I saw at once that the man knew too much not to be told more. For, if he believed what he said, he might give me the money and cause my arrest as soon as I reached the street.

I resolved to tell him the entire story. I did so, and he listened intently.

"This," he said, "is the most remarkable chapter of incidents I ever knew to happen in one night and morning. Then, Isobel is neither with her father nor her cousin, nor on board the *Cristobel*. This is amazing. I believe you. You have no need for deceit or crime, for your balance here is large and your credit unlimited. That removes from you all suspicion. But something must be done. Something must be done at once."

"But my hands are tied," I told him. "I have been warned that if I did not return with the money I would be killed."

"The order of Don Manuel is good. It is his own money, and if he wishes to give it to mountain robbers it is no concern of mine. I shall take steps at once to find Isobel."

In a few minutes he had counted out the necessary amount, put it in a sheep-skin bag, and handed it to me.

"Tell Don Manuel we shall be glad to see him in the morning," he said.

I fancied there was a peculiar accent to his voice, but I was so eager to get back and thus gain my own freedom from the surveillance of the gang that I didn't bother about the banker. I walked out of town to where I had left my horse. He was there, standing quietly. I mounted and started off at a canter.

I reached the spot where I had been waylaid in the morning, expecting to find one or more of Pedro's men waiting for me. There was no one. I left my horse tied to a tree by the roadside and hurried into the rocky fastness. It was deserted. Not a sign of bandit or banker was there to be seen.

CHAPTER XI.

WHAT I LEARNED FROM THE TRAITOR.

HERE was certainly a puzzling and disconcerting situation. I could think of no reason why Pedro and his gang of robbers, cutthroats, or whatever they called themselves, would leave their stronghold before gaining possession of Don Manuel's ransom money unless they had been discovered by soldiers.

But I spent little time thinking of Pedro's men. My own predicament was so bad that it absorbed what little wit I had left.

There I was, in one of the wildest regions in the vicinity of Santa Rosa, with a bag of gold belonging to Don Manuel, without the least knowledge of where Don Manuel was.

I sat down on a flat-topped stone and tried to think.

Anybody can sit down in a well-appointed library, or a comfortable den, or a sitting-room in a bungalow, and think.

But when one knows he is under the eyes of a murderous gang of robbers, and has in his possession a sheepskin bag of gold belonging to some one else, thinking is not so easy.

It usually is, I know, in fiction. The hero has simply to flick an eyelid and ideas come to him. Ideas were strangers to me as I sat on that stone and cudgeled my brain for half an hour.

It was, to say the least, the worst mess I had ever heard of. Where was Don Manuel? Had he been rescued from the

brigands, or had they carried him farther into the mountain recesses?

Where was Isobel? I had already asked myself innumerable questions concerning her.

Where were Balover and Kate Arnold? I had exhausted my brain trying to reach a conclusion as to them.

And lastly, where was Mary O'Donnell? Had she found the spring? Had she seen the face of her future husband? Or, had she fallen into the hands of such a band as followed Pedro?

The sensations of doubt, fear, rage, all mingled in my mind.

Gradually, however, I cooled down to something like reason, and, leaving all thoughts of others aside, began to think of myself.

I was wearing a gorgeous uniform that had attracted notice in Santa Rosa. It was not my uniform, and probably carried with it sensations that I knew nothing about.

I had a bag of gold that did not belong to me, and which I did not want.

Yet, clothed as I was, I dared not go back to Santa Rosa.

If the soldiers had discovered the brigands' hiding-place, and had taken Don Manuel away from them, it was probable—as such things go in South American republics—that a number of the gang escaped, and would be searching for me and the money I had taken from the bank.

If Don Manuel had not been taken by the soldiers, then soldiers were probably prowling around through the mountain forests, and would either shoot me or arrest me on sight.

It was a pleasant predicament—very. I wished I had stuck to my botanical studies. What had I to do with Balover's elopement, anyway?

Then, as I thought that, the beautiful face of Kate Arnold seemed to loom up before me. She was in trouble. I had but dimly seen her at night in the glare of my little lantern, and once in the morning before I had set out to find Mary O'Donnell. But she was lovely. There was no getting around that.

And a man, sitting alone on a rock in a situation where he might expect a bullet any minute, thinks deeply, quickly, and is sensitive to very vivid emotions.

But I brushed aside all sentimental thoughts. The question was, what could I do with the money? It was not my money. I did not want it. It belonged to Don Manuel—where was he?

And then it struck me, that, after all, the money belonged to Pedro. I had been sent to get it for him.

I found my way to the old tree, and, thrusting my hand in through the opening, I felt the iron-bound chest.

It was locked, as I found after dragging it out.

I knew this chest was sacred property: Not one of the men with Pedro would touch it—at least, so he had said.

Surely, I had no right to break open a chest that even a brigand of the mountains would not touch. And to place the bag of gold inside the old tree-trunk without any better protection was to leave it for the first individual who happened along and tried to explore the tree.

I replaced the chest, and, more perplexed than ever, went back and sat down on the flat stone to do some more thinking.

It is possible that many will say I did a lot of unnecessary thinking. Why did I not go right back to the bank with the gold?

I did not want to be shot. That's the reason.

I was sitting there, completely hidden from view among the rocks, when I heard some one walking on the rough ground, which was covered with loose stones of all sizes.

The sound came from the direction of the old tree. I crept to a spot where I could peep through between two huge boulders, and have a view of the opening in the trunk.

I saw the figure of a man. He stood near the tree; and standing erect, took a good look all around as if to make sure no one was within sight or hearing distance.

Seeing and hearing no one, he stooped down, thrust his hand inside the tree-trunk, and drew out Pedro's chest.

I was breathing hard then, for I knew that this man was a member of Pedro's gang and a traitor.

He picked up two heavy stones; and after repeated blows, holding one stone

at the side to steady the chest and banging at the lock with the other, he burst the chest open.

He plunged his hand inside, hauled out the clothing I had discarded for my uniform, and scattered the garments on the ground. Then he reached in again and took out a little bag, much like the one I carried, and such as I had seen do duty all over Santa Rosa instead of purses or pocketbooks.

He put this in his pocket, and then shoved the ruined chest back into place.

Then, standing with his back to me, he stood counting the money in the sheep-skin bag.

I crept silently up to him, and with a spring landed on his back.

"Say one word," I said in Spanish, "and I'll shoot you dead. I know you."

His breath came heavy and rapid.

"And I know you," he said in reply. "You are the American medico. Well, we are in the same boat. Release me. I have no wish to harm you."

I did release him, and he turned toward me with a face that would have been pale if it had not been so dirty.

"What do you mean by being in the same boat?" I demanded. "You are a thief. I am not. Where is Pedro? Where is Don Manuel?"

He grinned.

"You ought to know, *señor*."

"But I don't know. Tell me."

"It is safe to tell you, *señor*, because you dare not return to Santa Rosa. You did well. Not every *Americano* knows how to be a traitor."

"A traitor!" I cried. "You scoundrel, after robbing your leader's safety-box, you dare call me a traitor? Explain."

"If you are not a traitor, who is? Who sent the soldiers from the *alcalde's* under a lieutenant? Who had Pedro captured? Who had Don Manuel killed? Who went off with Don Manuel's gold? Answer me."

CHAPTER XII.

A TRYING MOMENT.

"DON MANUEL—killed!" I exclaimed.

The news took me so by surprise that

I was thrown off my guard. The ruf-fian sprang at me and gave me a stinging blow in the face that sent me reeling to the ground.

When I picked myself up he was gone.

About half-witted, I felt for the sheep-skin bag, which I had secreted inside the jacket of my uniform. It was there.

And now—what was I to do? Was Don Manuel killed or not?

If he was killed, to whom did the money belong?

I had gone to bring it to Pedro to pay for the freedom of the banker. Now, if the banker was dead, the money did not belong to Pedro. I knew little about the laws of the country. I had drawn the money on a bona-fide order from Don Manuel. If he was dead, then it seemed to me that the money belonged to his daughter Isobel. But where was she?

Altogether it made such a mess that after thinking it over for an hour I resolved to take the money back to the bank.

The clothing I wore then, the officer's uniform, was too conspicuous to return to Santa Rosa in. And the other suit, the one I had taken from my plant-hunter, was known and a ready mark for bullets or my arrest.

I compromised by taking about half of each, stripping the braid and gold lace from the uniform, and then I returned to where I had left my horse—Don Manuel's horse.

It was gone.

I remembered perfectly the tree to which I had tied him. But somebody—perhaps the robber I had seen—had taken my steed. So I set out on foot for Santa Rosa and Don Manuel's bank.

It was a long, weary trudge. The road was dusty and rough, and my loss of sleep had not added anything to my vigor. But after a toilsome tramp I did reach the town, and again found, as I had in the morning, signs of excitement.

"Pardon, *señor*," I said to a man I had never seen before, who was standing staring blankly at a wall, "is there any news?"

"News? News, *señor*? Have you been away?"

"I have. But there seems excitement here. I have already heard that there

was an elopement and a robbery. But this is something new."

"New? Yes, it is new, and yet it is an old story, *señor*. I am ruined by it. It seems a job was put up between Don Manuel Fernandez, the banker, and a rascally American. Fernandez sent the American with an order for all the cash there was in the bank.

"The American told a pitiful tale about Don Manuel being in the hands of mountain robbers. Well, the order was genuine, and Señor Jose Pinero, the assistant of Don Manuel in the bank, gave him the money. But—Pinero acted. He at once went to the *alcalde* and told him the story. The *alcalde* sent a detachment at once to the spot the American had spoken of, and there was a fight. And a fellow they called Pedro was captured. Pedro shot Fernandez before the soldiers captured him.

"There was no money found. The body of Fernandez was brought to his house. I understand so—I have not seen him. There are three medicos there now."

"And the bank—what did Pinero do?"

"Do? Just what all bankers do down here in a crisis. He took what money there was in sight and left. The bank is closed."

I stood there as dull-witted as the speaker, looking at the same blank wall.

If all this was true, then I could not return the money to the bank. To whom did it belong if not to Isobel Fernandez?

I made no reply, but, turning upon my own tracks, walked out of Santa Rosa. I seemed now to attract little or no attention, and could, had I so wished, have left for other and safer places.

But I could not carry away Isobel Fernandez's money, and I would not leave without knowing what had become of Kate Arnold, Balover, and the courageous Irish girl.

I trudged back again over the dusty road to the old *casa*, and there I rested. Out in a copse near the old house I shot a wild fowl, and, following the example set by Balover with the sheep, I built a fire in the old fireplace and cooked my supper.

I was exhausted. The cushions of Don Manuel's carriage were still where I had

placed them, and, arranging them again for comfort, I stretched myself out on them and was soon fast asleep.

My slumber was deep and sound. For hours I lay just like a dead man. If jaguars or other animals, pumas, mountain-lions, anything, howled, growled, or barked in the forests to the west, I heard them not.

But I was suddenly awakened by a touch. I felt, even the instant my senses became alert, a sudden fear. Some one was near me.

It was totally dark. I had no idea how long I had slept, but, from the darkness, believed that it was midnight or after.

Whoever was in the room with me

(To be continued.)

moved about noiselessly. Then again I felt his hand on my chest. Inside my shirt now I had the bag of gold that belonged to Isobel Fernandez.

The groping hand felt it. There came a half-stifed "Ah!" from my visitor.

I could imagine what he was doing. With one hand he felt the bulk and outlines of the sheepskin bag. With the other I could picture him in the dark drawing a knife to rip open the shirt.

If he succeeded in getting the gold without waking me—I might be permitted to live.

If I showed that I was awake—my life wasn't worth another breath.

That moment was the worst I ever experienced.

CAUGHT IN MESHES OF GOLD.

By MARIE B. SCHRADER.

What came of a snapped-off button in the way of making two people better acquainted, and the unhappy incident that thereupon ensued.

HE handed her a twenty-dollar bill! It was about five in the afternoon, and the charity bazaar was at its height.

A rather striking-looking young man was standing in front of the Woodland Dell when he extracted the twenty-dollar bill from a good-sized roll.

He had been passing the cave-like entrance when the hanging vines parted and a wood nymph stood before him. She was a little thing, her eyes a deep brown and her hair a glinting blond. She raised her lashes and looked him over carefully.

The swirling green and brown of her costume, the garlands of flowers which hung therefrom, and the clusters of jasmine in her hair, made her a picture not soon to be forgotten.

He watched her as she opened the large gold-mesh bag which swung from her arm.

"Stranger, you cannot pass here without my permission," she had playfully exclaimed as she stretched out one arm. And he halted instantly.

"And who will forbid me to continue on my weary way?" he retorted in a similar tone of jesting.

"Who but I?" said the dainty nymph with an audacious smile. "Do you not know that this is my kingdom, and that all who enter these expensive lands must pay for the privilege of trespassing?"

"No," he answered, "I didn't know that, but I am perfectly willing to pay. What is the toll?"

"One moment," she said, and disappeared behind the hanging vines only to reappear immediately, carrying a curious basket of twisted grape-vines, on which lay a sweet-scented burden of carnations and gardenias.

He glanced from the flowers to the face above them, and mentally commented upon the perfect companionship.

"Which will you have?" she inquired.

"Which would you advise?" he asked.

"A jasmine flower, by all means," she replied with a smile. "How could any one think of choosing a carnation?"

"I really don't see how one could do such a thing," he responded.

It was then he handed her the twenty-dollar bill, and she produced the gold-mesh bag.

"I have lots of money," she said, "so I shall have no trouble in giving you the exact change. In my domain flowers are expensive, especially flowers from the Southland. These came from my home. I had them shipped north in time for the bazaar. So you will have to pay a dollar for this. One moment, please; here's five, ten—"

She held out a handful of money of various denominations.

"I don't want any of that," he said, looking straight into her brown eyes. "Keep the change."

"But," she said, hesitating, "that's a little too much for one Cape jasmine, even if it is for charity. You could buy several plants for less than that."

"Oh, it isn't too much. Besides, I am greatly in debt to charity. I haven't paid as much attention to it in the past as I should have done. I never thought much about it, to tell the truth. I usually leave such matters to my mother and sister."

Suddenly he smiled at a thought, and then said aloud:

"I've always had a horror of bazaars. Do you know, this is the first one I ever attended?"

"And how do you like it?" she asked with a coquettish glance.

"I think it's immense," he answered enthusiastically. "Haven't enjoyed anything so much in years. Do you know, I had just come in when you stopped me. I was wondering which way to go first. I had half a mind to beat a retreat. There are so many lights and so many young women, and such a mixture of flowers and perfume, that the effect is really quite intoxicating. I wouldn't have believed that a bazaar could be so interesting. My sister has often begged me to go with her, but I never did."

"It's awfully generous of you to give me twenty dollars," she said, "because you are a stranger. My best friends didn't offer to pay that much for one flower."

While she talked, his eyes wandered from her face to the jasmine he held in his hand. A sudden bold determination took hold of him.

"Would you mind—" he began, holding out the blossom and significantly fingering the lapel of his coat. "I'm a bit awkward at such things."

She graciously consented to fasten the flower for him.

"There!"

"Nina," called some one from within the dell at that instant.

"Excuse me for a moment," said the brown-eyed girl as she turned quickly toward the entrance.

She didn't go very far, however, for her gold-mesh bag swung out and fastened itself on the nearest button of the stranger's coat and impolitely lifted it from its fastenings.

While Nina stood aghast at the havoc she had wrought, the voice from the dell continued:

"Come and have some tea."

Nina paid no attention to the invitation. She stood still, looking at the loose threads in the coat.

"Oh, what have I done?" she exclaimed. "I'm so sorry. It was awfully clumsy of me."

An inspiration seized the stranger.

"There's only one thing to be done," he said. "You must sew it on again."

"Really?" asked the girl hesitatingly.

"Assuredly," he replied.

"But I have no needle and thread," she objected, and then, as if with sudden inspiration: "But I know where I can get them. Wait here till I come back."

In another moment she had disappeared in the crowd.

She was back again, almost immediately.

"Here are the implements," she said. "You haven't been inside my Woodland Dell yet. Perhaps you've forgotten that I am the presiding nymph of it."

"Oh, no," said the stranger. "I never thought of you as anything else."

"It's nice and cool in there. Do you drink tea?"

Did he drink tea? Only when he couldn't help it.

"Oh, yes," he answered shamelessly. "I love it. It's my favorite beverage."

"We have the finest in America right here," she continued. "The countess had it sent from China in time for the bazaar. I shall give you a cup of it and you shall watch me brew it."

He held aside the vines through which they entered. The various corners were inspected until finally they ensconced themselves in a shaded nook in front of which a spruce-tree threw out its fragrance and where friendly vines trailing over a trellis-work made an alluring background for the rustic bench on which they sat.

It was all perfectly delightful! She threaded the needle with deft fingers and placed the thimble in position.

"Where's the button?"

"Are you really going to all the trouble of sewing it on?" he asked.

"Kindly lean over just a little," was her only answer.

He was too pleased to obey the command, for it brought him nearer to her. As she took hold of the lapel of his coat he caught the perfume of the jasmine in her hair.

"Jasmine is certainly sweet," he murmured, drawing in a deep breath. The button was speedily fastened back in place, too speedily to suit the good-looking stranger.

She wound the thread around and around to make it secure. A wave of her hair brushed against his cheek.

"I wish there were more buttons to be sewed on," he said with a laugh.

Then, still smiling, he forced down more tea and expressed his approval.

"Delicious! Never tasted anything half so good," he exclaimed rapturously. "I shall always remember it."

Some one called her again.

"I know I am detaining you," he said apologetically.

"To tell the truth, you are," she answered, with a smile and a penetrating glance from her brown eyes. "However, I don't mind. I haven't had a rest the whole afternoon. This tea is refreshing. Won't you have another cup?"

Would he? Of course he would. Anything to prolong his stay. He would have drunk any concoction, no matter how disagreeable, if she offered it.

"I wish we might sit here forever," he murmured. "It's a charming spot, and so—so—"

"I understand," she said. "I like it, too."

"Just suppose I hadn't wandered in here," he went on. "Think how much

I would have missed. I wouldn't have met you. Something brought me here, and you stood in the way. I had an appointment," he continued, looking at his watch, "but it's long past the time, and I don't care. I want to know you better. May I say something?"

"Yes," she answered softly.

His admiration was too evident to be doubted, and she was secretly pleased.

"I like you very much!" he declared with emphasis on the "very."

"What time is it?" she asked suddenly by way of response.

"It's about six," he said.

"So late? Mama will soon be here. I can't imagine what is detaining her, and, and— She will come looking for me. I must be going."

"Will you be here again to-night?" he inquired.

"No," she answered. "We are going to a dinner-party at eight, and—why do you ask that?"

"Because I would come back and buy more flowers," he replied with an admiring look.

"I am sorry!" she said, "but a dinner-party is a dinner-party and there is no escape at such a late hour. Besides, I couldn't get away, anyhow. Mama makes all the engagements and I must go."

"I am promised for the evening, too," he said, "but I would forget all the rules of etiquette just to see you again."

"It's too bad," she murmured.

"Tell me one thing," he continued. "You're not engaged, are you?"

"Engaged!" she repeated with a puzzled expression.

"Yes, some one's fiancée."

"Not yet," she answered with a teasing smile. "I'm going to meet 'the one man' to-night. At least, he's the man my mother has selected for me. I don't know what he will think about it, and I don't care. I don't expect to get married to any one. I've never been in love, and I've never even thought of liking some one well enough to become engaged. I have a horror of falling in love. Awful, isn't it? Of course I shall hate 'the one man,' and he will pronounce me little and insignificant, and he won't like me. These family arrangements are always so disagreeable and so

disappointing to every one concerned, aren't they?"

"Sometimes they turn out well," he said, "but very rarely. No one could choose my life partner for me."

"Now, that's the way I feel about it," she continued. "I have made up my mind that I shall never marry unless I happen to love the man."

"But your mother! What will she say?"

"Oh, I shall put my foot down at the proper time. I haven't found it necessary yet. I thought I would wait a little longer. You see, the poor man doesn't know that he's the victim. Isn't it funny? He doesn't suspect a thing. His family approves of me for him, and mama has settled on him for me. Won't the poor fellow be surprised when he discovers the wicked plot? I have a good notion to tell him all about it myself this evening when he takes me in to dinner. Romantic, isn't it?" she added with a little, sarcastic laugh.

"It is indeed a shame to take advantage of the poor fellow," said the stranger, "but, in my opinion, he's a lucky dog. I envy him."

"But he won't like me," she insisted.

"How can he help it?" he asked, taking in the beautiful picture she made as she toyed with her teacup. "But why doesn't he know about all this?"

She laughed with evident enjoyment.

"Because his mother says the moment he knows some member of the family has planned something for him, he is bound to balk. He must be very stubborn. Don't you think so?"

"Only a natural stubbornness. I don't blame him at all. I'm like that myself. But I'll wager a big sum he won't balk this time. I know a little something about my own sex. You will have your hands full. Perhaps you will like him?" he added with a frown.

"Nothing of the sort," she replied. "There's not one chance in a million of that. How could I when he's mama's choice? I want to find and choose my husband all by myself."

"Um! A bit stubborn," he commented.

"Yes. You see, from the start of our acquaintance we should be too much alike, he and I. I feel sure we would

never, never get along. But, really, it is very late. I must be going."

"Oh, please don't go. Just five minutes longer!"

"I can't stay."

"Let's have another cup of this wonderful tea?" he suggested quickly, groping for any excuse to detain her.

She shook her head.

"Oh, I do hope I shall have the pleasure of seeing you again. Would it be very bold of me if I invited you to have lunch with me to-morrow in the palm-room on the main floor?"

"That would be impossible," she answered coldly. "We have been entirely too unconventional as it is. If mama knew about it she would scold me dreadfully. To lunch with you is simply out of the question."

"Pardon me. That was an awkward thing for me to suggest. You are not offended, are you?"

"Oh, no; but you shouldn't have mentioned it. No, I couldn't possibly take lunch with you, but—" She paused significantly and then added: "I might happen to be here at this time to-morrow."

The brown eyes looked up shyly from under the sweeping lashes as if afraid of his answer. "Are you sure?" he asked quickly.

"Why, don't you believe me? Here, then. You were so generous about the flower, I'll leave with you some token of good faith." She opened her gold-mesh bag and emptied the contents on a little, lace-trimmed handkerchief, which she spread on her lap to receive the bazaar money. She tied the handkerchief in a bundle and handed the empty bag to her companion.

"What a beautiful thing!" he exclaimed as he examined it carefully. "The workmanship is perfect. Evidently made by an artist. The jewels are exquisitely set. Diamonds and sapphires. I admire the combination. I should say it cost somewhere between five hundred and fifty and six hundred dollars. Am I right?"

"What an expert guesser you are! It cost exactly five hundred and seventy-five dollars. Now, you see, how certainly I must be on hand to-morrow to reclaim it."

He placed the bag in his pocket and said:

"I will keep it safely until we meet again. But suppose something should happen to it. I hadn't thought of that. Would you feel badly?"

"Of course I would," she answered without hesitation. "It was a gift from mama, and I value it more highly on that account. She is always cautioning me about losing it."

At this moment a girl friend appeared and told her that her mother was waiting below in an automobile, and had sent word that she should hurry.

"I'm glad she didn't come up here," said Nina. "She might have seen you, and wouldn't have approved of my chatting with a stranger."

"Allow me to get your wraps," he suggested, but she thanked him and shook her head.

In another moment she was gone, and he stood alone outside the entrance of the Woodland Dell. He wondered if it were not a real nymph who had bewitched him. Glancing down at the jasmine in his coat, he thought of those that she wore in her hair.

All the charm had vanished with her. He looked about the room, suddenly realizing that it was late. The crowd was thinning out. It was time to dress for dinner.

How he hated the thought! Too bad he couldn't have stayed at the bazaar indefinitely. But such was fate. They had met and they had parted.

Would they meet again? He earnestly hoped so. He felt for the gold bag in his pocket to assure himself that he was not dreaming.

Yes, there it was. The thought gladdened him as he left the place with the one word "to-morrow" ringing in his ears.

II.

MEANTIME, Nina wended her way through little groups of her friends, stopping here and there to exchange a few comments on the happenings of the afternoon.

Finally she reached the dressing-room, where she hastened to freshen herself up a bit. Hastily thrusting her small feet into her carriage shoes, she threw her

long, fur-lined cloak about her and left the scene of what she confessed to herself had been the most interesting episode of her life.

She tried to think of the dinner-party, but she couldn't, for invariably her thoughts reverted to the handsome stranger. She would see him again at five to-morrow. To-morrow! What a long time off!

She wondered what her mother would say if she knew what she had done. Well, she wouldn't tell mama. Suddenly she remembered that her mother had been waiting some time; that it was late, and there was much to be done on her arrival at home. Her hair had to be rearranged, and the wood nymph's costume replaced by a Parisian creation especially selected for this occasion.

"When you meet Mr. Stuyvesant Van Cortland," said her mother, "I want you to look like a princess of the blood royal."

As the elevator reached the gilt-latticed door at the main floor, Nina thought she caught sight of a familiar pair of broad shoulders.

It was the handsome stranger. He was leaning against the desk with his back toward her. The next moment the clerk handed him his key.

Nina stood still for a moment watching him, hoping he would turn around and see her. She drew back with a half-suppressed exclamation. He *had* turned, but not to greet her. For just as he was moving away, a tall young woman, in the latest cut of tailor-made gown, rushed up to him and spoke in a familiar way.

Nina was too far off to hear even one word of the conversation, but their actions were enough. A smile of happy recognition crossed the stranger's face. The young woman laid her hand on his arm and pulled him to one side while she talked.

He, apparently, was drinking in every word with rapt attention. She was smiling and laughing coquettishly. What if she were his fiancée! Nina hadn't thought of such a possibility. He had asked if she were engaged, but somehow it had never occurred to her that he might be, and he hadn't volunteered any information on the subject.

Evidently the girl was greatly pleased. Who wouldn't be? The next moment the lobby seemed to swim before her eyes, for the handsome stranger reached down into his pocket and disclosed to the horrified view of the watcher a gold-mesh bag, which he handed to the young lady.

Nina passed her hand across her eyes. No, it was all too true. There it was! Nina stood petrified. She couldn't have spoken to save her life. When she came to a thorough realization of the situation he had gone.

The beautiful young woman to whom he had given the bag was coming toward her. Evidently she, too, was on her way to the carriage entrance. The smile of delight with which she had received the bag was still on her face as she examined the gift, turned it over, then opened and shut it.

It was empty. There could be no mistake. It was the bag Nina had just given him as a "proof of good faith."

"A proof of good faith, indeed!" she repeated to herself.

Nina didn't take time to think of what she was about to do. She stepped to one side, instinctively, as the young woman passed her. A sense of humiliation and furious indignation took possession of her. Then, acting on the impulse of the moment, she ran up to the young woman as she neared the door and snatched the gold bag from her fingers.

Before the other woman had recovered from her surprise at so unexpected an attack, Nina had hurried out to the waiting automobile. The liveried footman opened the door, and with the one word "Home," she was safely inside and the powerful Mercedes was whirling her away from the scene.

She closed her fingers tightly around the bag, as if she would like to crush it to atoms.

So that was the man by whom she had been so quickly fascinated! Oh, it was too terrible! How could she ever survive the shame of it? How he must have enjoyed the *tête-à-tête* with her. How readily she had fallen a victim to his attractions. Her face crimsoned with the conflicting emotions which filled her breast. Why hadn't she suspected him when he asked her how he could be sure

she would keep the appointment for the next day? Well, one had to learn by bitter experience; but it was hideous, all the same.

It wasn't the cost of the bag she regretted; it was the easy way in which he had been able to accomplish his purpose. She saw it all now, when the understanding came too late.

"What makes you so thoughtful, Nina?" asked her mother as the automobile turned up Massachusetts Avenue. She thanked Heaven they were now almost in front of the white-stone palace they called "home." Oh, to get to the privacy of her room where she could think unmolested and put into tears her pent-up feelings!

"You must brighten up, dear. Remember I want you to make an impression on Mr. Van Cortland."

"Mr. Van Cortland! I don't care if I never meet him. I hate him. I hate everybody, especially men. They're all false. All trying to prey on some poor woman for one reason or another. As far as marrying is concerned, mama, I shall never marry. I despise men."

"My dear child!" exclaimed the mother in astonishment at this outburst. "What is the matter with you?" Then, sudden suspicion crossing her mind: "You haven't fallen in love secretly, have you?"

"In love?" answered Nina, with a touch of bitterness. "There's no such thing."

"Now, my dear child, that's what I have been telling you," went on the mother persuasively. "That's why I have pointed out to you the advantages of such a man as Van Cortland."

"I mean to be an old maid," announced Nina with decision.

"Where's your gold bag?" suddenly asked her mother.

It was with a feeling of thanksgiving that Nina held out the recovered gift and answered: "Here it is, mama. Did you think I had lost it?"

Just then the automobile drew up in front of their home, and they entered.

While Nina and her mother were dressing for dinner an altogether different scene was being enacted in the lobby of the Willard Hotel.

Excitement prevailed where only a

few moments before every one was laughing and chatting quietly. Cries of "Stop thief!" fell on the startled ears of the guests. As it was the dinner-hour, the place was full of persons.

Politicians, diplomats, newspaper men, and other representatives of various callings stood in groups discussing the events of the day. People were passing in and out from the lobby into the corridors, and the room was a picture of life and color. The consternation caused by the "Stop thief!" cry may be imagined.

Each person instinctively felt for his purse and jewelry.

A young woman, in a tailor-made gown, stood near the carriage entrance, bewildered.

"A woman took my gold-mesh bag," she declared.

Immediately the affair became noised about the hotel, and furnished the subject of conversation for some time afterward.

"It must have been a professional from New York," sagely decided the head detective, whose duty it was to guard the welfare of the hotel guests. "Looks like Nell Le Blanc. Didn't know she was in town. I'll look her up."

The victim of the theft was so stunned by the suddenness of the incident that she was unable to furnish details, but there was one man who insisted that the purse-snatcher was a young and pretty woman, who wore an expensive, fur-trimmed wrap. He further stated that she had immediately disappeared in a huge automobile, with a liveried chauffeur and a footman attached.

The detectives scoffed at the idea of a woman thief fitting such a description, and dismissed the information with a laugh.

Reporters from the local newspapers got wind of the robbery, and the incident was soon on the lips of the whole town. That so bold an attack should occur in so public a place astonished all who heard of it. The cleverness of the thief surpassed everything on record.

The young woman who had been robbed was the object of undivided interest. She stated that she valued the purse more for sentimental reasons than for its intrinsic worth.

While all the questioning and surmising was in progress at the Willard,

Nina was slowly making her toilet for the dinner-party. How distracting to be compelled to smile and say inane things when one was so upset. She didn't care how she looked. What was Mr. Stuyvesant Van Cortland to her that she should force herself to be gay and to look her best?

Her mother opened the door.

"What takes you so long, Nina?" she asked. "We will be late if you don't hurry."

"I'm ready," said the daughter.

All the way to the house of their hostess, on Connecticut Avenue, she reasoned with herself that after all it was a fortunate occurrence. Had she not profited by the experience? She had her bag, and was wiser as well.

By the time they drew up in front of their destination she was rather more like her old self, and as she walked into the reception-hall she had quite determined that she would be more vivacious, more coquettish than ever.

"Are we late?" her mother politely inquired as they entered the large salon.

"Oh, no," sweetly replied their hostess. "You are just in time. Mr. Van Cortland, however, hasn't arrived yet. Every one else is here."

Eight o'clock was struck by the musical-toned clock in the hall, and Van Cortland had not appeared. The guests were all chatting, apparently unmindful of this breach of etiquette, but each was secretly wondering as to the cause of it; for certainly a Van Cortland would not willingly commit a breach of decorum.

"Ah, there he is at last!" exclaimed the man with whom Nina was chatting.

He looked in the direction of the door, and Nina's eyes followed his gaze.

She nearly fainted. It was too much. There he stood in flesh and blood, the handsome stranger.

So this was Van Cortland, the model man her mother had selected for her. He was another Raffles. He posed as a gentleman, when he was so only by reason of his polished manners.

Should she expose him to their hostess? No, she decided. She would wait for the proper moment. She would have no mercy on him then. She would show him that she could do a little acting on her own account.

He was not aware of the fact that she had seen him give her bag to another woman. Of course he would never suspect that she had regained possession of it in so strange a fashion.

Her hostess stood before her, and spoke the formal words of introduction.

"Oh, yes, I have had the pleasure of meeting Mrs. Dalrymple, but Miss Dalrymple—ah, that is indeed a pleasure!" said Van Cortland with a smile, as he recovered from the first shock of meeting his "wood nymph" again in so unexpected a fashion.

He spoke the conventional words in an embarrassed manner, for Nina stood staring him full in the face. It was all she could do to refrain from crying out loud to the guests:

"Do you know who this man is? You think he's Stuyvesant Van Cortland, gentleman, but I can tell you another story."

However, she thought of her hostess. Such a scene would not only be offensive to her, but to every one present. Then, again, she wanted to play with him as a cat plays with a mouse.

"Make a scene in your own home if you wish, but never in that of a friend," was an unwritten law which Nina remembered as she smiled sweetly, and she spread out her train preparatory to accompanying Van Cortland into the dining-room.

"Have you been in Washington long, Mr. Van Cortland?" Nina inquired, as they seated themselves.

"I arrived this afternoon," he answered; "just in time for the—" with a significant look.

"And how long shall you remain?" went on Nina, completely ignoring his pointed pause.

"That depends."

"Oh, I understand. Some business affair. That is the only certain attraction in Washington for New York men."

"I came over specially for this dinner," he went on, not noticing the innuendo. "I can't say how long I may stay. I had expected to return to-morrow morning, but I may make an indefinite stop."

"He little dreams how much I know," thought Nina.

They chatted on trivial subjects. Several times he endeavored to make her

refer to the events of the afternoon, but she was too skilful for him, and evaded all reference to their previous meeting.

"Washington is a beautiful city," he remarked during an awkward gap.

"Yes. I love it. The people are honest. There is none of that underhand dealing and hypocrisy that exists in some other cities."

He looked at her as if he didn't quite understand, and answered negligently:

"Oh, those traits are to be found everywhere. Washington is not immune. As far as that goes, strange as it may seem, there are some persons who do not object seriously to dishonesty provided it is cleverly put to use. Raffles, for instance, proves my theory. He was a very popular man, and a beautiful woman loved him. More than that, she stuck to him through thick and thin. One shakes hands with dishonest persons every day, but one knows nothing about it until they are exposed."

"Raffles is all well enough in fiction," said Nina, amazed at the boldness of his illustration; "but it wouldn't do to be one in private life."

"Wouldn't you stick to a fellow through thick and thin? You impress me as that sort of a young woman."

"I would not," answered Nina, "if he were a social highwayman. If he posed as a thief, I could at least admire his frankness, but to pretend to be everything that is fine and honorable, and in reality to be— It is too horrible!"

"How seriously you speak," commented her companion, scrutinizing her closely. "Any one would think a social highwayman was here among us."

The different courses were being served so that their conversation was carried on at intervals. Nina spoke now and again a few words to the man on her left, but Van Cortland persisted in devoting all his time to her, much to the discomfort of the young woman on his right, who was keenly alive to the social advantages of his acquaintance.

"She is welcome to him," thought Nina. "If she knew what I know she wouldn't be so anxious."

Once in a while a worried look would cross his face, but with an effort he would get rid of the thought that prompted it.

"You'll pardon me for referring to the matter, won't you?" he said, with sudden emphasis; "but I must talk about this afternoon. I never spent such a delightful time in my life. I remember everything—every word, every look. So you are Miss Dalrymple, and your mother approves of me? I'm glad to know it."

Nina froze him with a glance.

"My mother's approval is not always my own," she said in frigid tones.

"Forgive me. I didn't mean that. A girl like yourself, so much sought after, has dozens of admirers. There is seldom room for the last comer. I understand all that; but, somehow, I hoped—"

"Please don't refer to such things," said Nina. "The others will hear you. It has been very embarrassing to me—very humiliating, I assure you. We all make mistakes."

"You haven't changed your mind about to-morrow, have you?" he asked anxiously.

"What about to-morrow?" innocently inquired Nina.

"You were good enough to say that you might be at the bazaar in time for a cup of tea."

"Did I say that?"

"Can you have forgotten so soon?"

"The impudence of his mentioning it," thought Nina. "Here's my opportunity to catch him. Will you be there?" she asked, arching her eyebrows.

"Of course," he answered eagerly. "By the way, speaking of to-morrow reminds me of what occurred after I left you."

"What did occur?"

"Haven't you heard?"

"No."

"You haven't heard about the robbery?" he asked, in apparent astonishment.

"Robbery?"

"Yes. It's the talk of the town. The Willard is agog over the thing ever since it happened. All the Washington detectives are hot on the trail."

"Something was stolen at the Willard?"

"Yes. My sister's gold-mesh bag."

"Oh!" Then after a long pause she said: "You have a sister here in town?"

"Yes. She came down from New

York with my mother and myself to spend a few days in Washington. To-day is her birthday, and I had to get her a gold bag she had set her heart on."

Nina shrugged her shoulders.

"Now, the newspapers to-morrow, no doubt, will be full of the theft," he went on. "A woman thief, too! They say she's from New York. I have offered a reward, but I suppose it is useless. Valuable articles like that seldom turn up afterward. I don't think much of the Washington police. If it had happened in New York there might be a possibility of its recovery, but here—"

She looked at him, amazed at his effrontery.

"How little he suspects that I know!" she thought.

"Let me ask you something," she said aloud in bantering fashion. "Have you been in the habit of taking the purses of young and unsophisticated maidens?"

"Oh, no. This afternoon was my first experience."

"But not your last, I presume," she added sarcastically, as she realized how successful he had been. "Of course, you meant to keep your word and really be at the bazaar to-morrow at five?"

"Of course I did," he said promptly.

"But things are somewhat changed now?" This with a questioning smile.

"Why should they be? I can meet you just the same."

"But you will be busy looking for the bag."

"Oh, I won't let a little thing like that prevent me from being there. Of course it is disturbing, but we won't bother any more about the bag."

"Then you will be there?" she asked, to draw him out further.

"Oh, yes."

"But remember the understanding; you are to return the pledge of good faith then."

"I haven't forgotten," said Van Cortland.

"Well, what will you do about it now?"

"After what has happened, perhaps I had better give it to you at once."

"Would that be possible?"

"I should say so," replied the young man, drawing a gold-mesh bag from a pocket next his heart.

Nina's brown eyes opened wide with amazement. Words were inadequate to describe the mingled feelings with which she gazed at the bag.

What did it mean? She couldn't believe her own eyes. Here was the bag still in his possession. How did it come there when she herself had placed it in the bureau drawer on her return home from the Willard?

It was too mystifying for words. For a moment she thought she must be losing her senses.

She held out her hand mechanically.

"I much prefer you to take it now," he said, "for, really, I am afraid to keep it longer. I will take your word that you will be at the bazaar to-morrow at five. There," he finished as he placed it on her lap, "I needn't worry about it any more."

She said nothing, but stared at him as if she couldn't grasp the entire meaning of the sudden turn of events.

"Why, you seem bewildered. You look as if you hadn't expected to see the bag again."

She hesitated, started to say something, then stopped. Finally, she managed to gain sufficient control over herself to stammer:

"I don't quite understand."

"What?"

"How is it that you have this bag, when I saw you give it to the young woman at the Willard? You seemed glad to see her, and—and gave her this," she concluded, lifting up the bag.

He looked at her blankly for a moment; then asked in a questioning manner:

"You saw me give the young lady the bag?"

"Yes." She nodded her head emphatically.

"That was my sister. She was on her way to keep an engagement. I had promised her a present, and she held me up for it. I'm sorry I was in such a hurry to get to my room to change my clothes. If I were the proper sort of brother I would have seen her to her carriage, then all this would not have happened and I would be in the price of a new bag for her.

"I would like to meet the person who stole that other. Very likely I would

forget that I am a gentleman. By Jove! I'm glad that it wasn't *your* bag—I don't know what I would have done under the circumstances. As it is, all I can do is to see that the guilty person is brought to justice."

Nina lifted her dainty, lace-trimmed handkerchief to her lips. She watched him furtively as he plunged his fork into the lettuce salad before him. The truth of the situation slowly percolated through her brain.

She was the guilty person!

Nina looked about her and wondered at the scene of merriment. The other guests were laughing and chatting as if they hadn't a care in the world. Certainly they hadn't the faintest suspicion of the tense little drama being enacted by two of their immediate circle.

Conflicting emotions were raging beneath her white satin bodice. One moment she was on the verge of laughter; the next of tears. The man whom she had first trusted, then doubted, now loomed before her in strong colors of manliness and integrity.

When her part in the bag incident became known to him what would he say or do?

"I beg your pardon, sir," spoke a low voice at Van Cortland's elbow.

It was the butler. Nina gave a start.

"A message for you, sir!" went on the servant, handing him an envelope. "It's very important, sir. The detective is waiting for an answer."

Van Cortland laid down his fork and excused himself while he read the message. Nina sat rigid in her chair, hardly daring to breathe. Van Cortland tore open the envelope with a great deal of energy.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed. "The Washington police are not so slow after all. It wasn't a New York crook, but a young lady prominent in Washington society. They don't want to proceed without further orders from me, because they think there is something wrong 'somewhere.'"

"And what will your answer be?" asked Nina in constrained tones.

"Be! Why, to go ahead at once, no matter whom it concerns. I mean to see that justice is done."

"What if I should happen to be the

guilty one?" questioned Nina, looking him squarely in the eyes.

Without the quiver of an eyelash he answered her:

"I would do anything for you. But you could do no wrong."

She leaned over and said softly:

"Send word to the detective that the bag has been returned."

Thinking that she was merely putting his sincerity to a test, he stood ready to prove to her that he would do anything, no matter what the cost. He motioned quietly to the butler.

"Tell the detective that the bag has been returned," he ordered.

"Very well, sir," said the butler with a puzzled look as he turned to leave the room.

A sense of infinite relief took possession of Nina.

"Now, then, my wood nymph, I trust you are satisfied. Any further commands by which I may prove my devotion?"

"None," she said gaily. "You have already demonstrated it beyond a doubt."

"Then you approve of me?"

"That is not the question. What will you think of me when you learn the part I've taken in this whole affair?"

"You!"

"Yes. I am the guilty one, believe me. Now, what are you going to do with me?"

"I know what I would like to do," he said, "but, will you please enlighten me as to your meaning."

"When I saw you give the gold-mesh bag to a young woman at the Willard, I supposed it was mine, and it hurt me to think that there was some one else. I did what any other woman would have done under similar circumstances. Now, then, what have you to say to me?"

"It looks as if we have been caught in meshes of gold," answered Van Cortland. "Will you be at the Woodland Dell to-morrow at five?"

"Yes, I will then deliver the bag to you as a pledge of good faith," said Nina. "But how will we explain the incident to your sister?"

"Leave that to me," replied Van Cortland as he made the resolve that he himself would keep the bag as a treasured souvenir, while his sister would have to content herself with another one from Berry & Whitmore's.

At this moment Mrs. Dalrymple drew the attention of her hostess to the fact that Nina and Mr. Van Cortland had been absorbed in each other to the exclusion of all else throughout the entire dinner.

"What did I tell you?" asked Mrs. Dalrymple proudly. "You see I was right. He's the one man. I certainly knew that they would be suited to each other."

The young lady on Van Cortland's right was very much annoyed by the manner in which Nina had monopolized the interest of the New Yorker during the evening. She had made several unsuccessful attempts to engage him in conversation. Turning to him now with a determined effort, she remarked:

"Elizabeth Neville is so puzzled to know what to give her bridesmaids at her wedding. What would you suggest?"

"I really couldn't say," answered Van Cortland politely, "but I am positive that at a certain wedding in the near future the bride will present her bridesmaids with gold-mesh bags."

"A charming idea," interrupted Nina, knowing quite well in her heart to whose wedding he referred.

LUNAR THOUGHTS.

THE moon, the moon, so silver and cold,
Her fickle temper has oft been told,

Now shady—now bright and sunny—

But of all the lunar things that change,

The one that shows most fickle and strange,

And takes the most eccentric range,

Is the moon—so called—of honey.

Thomas Hood.

CHICAGO BY THURSDAY.*

By EDGAR FRANKLIN.

Author of "Washington—or Worse?" "The Price of Silence," "In Savage Splendor," etc.

The thunderbolt suddenly dropped in the path of a
business man on his last lap to a ten-thousand dollar goal.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

GEORGE CLIFFORD has just succeeded in arranging for his firm an important merger of manufacturing companies, and is to turn in the papers at his office in Chicago by noon of the following Thursday.

He is to receive some deeds from a man named Mecklen at Walden Gardens, near the town of Downsford, Ohio, and saying good-by at Downsford to his friend, John Austen, who starts at once for New York, he goes to his hotel. Finding that the clerk has given him a roommate, who is half-seas over, he leaves at once for Walden Gardens.

Upon his return in the early morning he is arrested for the murder of this same man, Brandon Smith, of Altoona. In his pockets are discovered the valuables of the murdered man, which he had been on the point of depositing for safe-keeping at the hotel office, and Clifford is held on suspicion.

He has given up all hope of reaching Chicago by Thursday, when his escape from the jail is cleverly managed by a stranger, who gives his name as Elthorpe. This man, under pretense of helping Clifford on his way to Chicago, hurries him aboard the wrong train after stealing his important papers. He meets his victim again in the town of Hempfield, where Clifford leaves the train and discovers his loss. In a private dining-room of the hotel he tells Clifford that he is an agent of the opposition to Clifford's firm, and tries to force him into making over the assignments he has obtained. He produces a revolver, for the mastery of which he and Clifford struggle. At last Clifford gets the upper hand, and suddenly a shot roars through the silence.

CHAPTER X.

ONWARD!

WITH a cry and a bound, Clifford leaped to his feet!

With a wild groan, Elthorpe rolled over and lay still, the Colt beside him on the floor.

And between the pistol and the prostrate men there trickled out a little line of red!

Suspicion seemed to have become fact! Clifford appeared to have dropped straight into the title of—*murderer*!

Action in minutes or in hours can be put into words.

Action in seconds is rather more difficult—for sometimes affairs that consume seconds in actuality, consume pages of print.

Clifford straightened up and gripped the edge of the overturned table tightly.

There was a man on the floor—a dead man! And he had killed him—he,

George Clifford, twenty-four hours ago a respected citizen, later a suspected murderer, had killed him!

And there was very little doubt about it. Elthorpe was lying there, limp and motionless. The groans had ceased altogether now, and there was little or no sign of breathing. Indeed, to all outward appearances, Elthorpe was—*dead*!

And, less than a day back, Clifford had been arrested in Downsford for murder! And now—

Very abruptly, a curious calm came over him.

This—whatever wretched blow circumstances might have dealt him in the case of the gentleman from Altoona—*this* was a clear case of murder! He'd be taken now, in a matter of a minute or two, and escorted to the jail at Hempfield, rather than to the jail at Downsford, unless—well, unless he took quick precautionary measures!

He stared around hurriedly.

* Began January ARGOSY. Single copies, 10 cents.

That man had been on the floor for a full thirty seconds now. Steps were moving audibly below, too; they seemed to be hurrying upward.

Swiftly Clifford darted toward the bundles of papers that had shot across the room with the overturning of the table. One of them was thrust into the right pocket; the other went as quickly into the left—and Clifford straightened up again.

Well, he had his documents. The next thing was to get away with them before an alarm could be given, and—what was that?

A knock had sounded loudly upon the panels of the hall door. He looked around. There must be another means of exit.

And there was! Absurdly near him was a smaller door—a nice, unostentatious little portal, resplendent in white paint. He tried the handle, and it turned readily.

He paused for an instant, and gave a last glance toward the still figure on the carpet. Not a single muscle seemed to have changed position—and as Clifford started suddenly, a voice cried from the corridor:

"Open that door, please! What's the matter? Open—"

The voice dropped away. Its owner seemed to be listening. Other steps followed on the stairway—and Mr. Clifford opened his own particular door and walked out!

There were stairs before him, a narrow flight which led—somewhere. He closed the door and started downward. He was going somewhere, and he did not care particularly where. He hurried to the bottom and found another door.

With an entirely unconcerned smile, Clifford opened it and stepped out.

This seemed to be the yard of the kitchen region. A maid or two sat about, peeling potatoes or preparing vegetables. Clifford nodded pleasantly, and shaped his course for the gate beyond. Nonchalantly he pushed it open with his foot and passed through; and in whatever street he had landed, he was at least free.

In a way, it was more than amazing! He paused for an instant and stared about, astonished at his own success in the new escape.

He adjusted his hat, then, and walked out with an entirely dignified calm, toward the avenue.

No one seemed to be paying much attention to him. He sauntered to the corner and turned up the broader thoroughfare; and if he traveled at a pace slightly more rapid than usual, no one seemed to note the fact.

Six or eight blocks, and he reached a little park, well hedged in with thick bushes and shrubs. Evening was near; not more than a dozen children were playing about.

Without ostentation, Clifford removed Mr. Elthorpe's overcoat and rolled it into a small and neat mass. With a toss, it went into the brush, and tumbled conveniently out of sight under a mass of shrubbery. The later wearer leaned forward pensively and rested his chin upon both hands—and, with a tremendous effort, brought his brain back to working order.

For the second time in a single day he was escaping the consequences of a murder!

That, in itself, was a bit staggering! The fact that he had committed neither murder was almost immaterial. In the eyes of the law, he was due to pay the penalty for both.

And also—ah, that eternal Chicago by Thursday!

That, as concerned actual facts, was the worst part of it all! That was the real essence of the situation. The murders he certainly hadn't committed; just as certainly, he *must* get those papers to Chicago by Thursday; and for a short space his brain whizzed dizzily around as he stared at the gravel path.

A child raced by with a hoop. Another followed on a tricycle, and, as they vanished in the distance, Clifford sat up with a grunt.

When a thing has to be done, it has to be done. This might be Tuesday evening, and he himself might be somewhere in the unknown eastern depths of Ohio; but he'd have to be in Chicago by Thursday—and that was the end of it.

How?

Not by train, because all trains from this region went through Downsford.

Clifford arose, and continued his pondering as he walked.

When one wants to know anything, one should ask a policeman. Clifford, therefore, sighted the first blue uniform and inquired:

"If a man feels like a long trolley ride, could he get from here to Chicago?"

"What's that?" came almost suspiciously.

"I say, I'm on my way to Chicago—just loafing about, you know—and I fancied it might be possible to get there by trolley."

Clifford yawned. The policeman relaxed into his usual lethargic good-humor.

"Well, you can get a trolley straight from here to Downsford and—"

"I don't want to go through Downsford. I know all about that part of the State. Isn't there some other way—some way of hitting the northern part of Ohio, and seeing something new?"

The policeman scratched his head.

"I'm afraid not, mister. Everything west from here goes through Downsford."

"Bosh!" Clifford yawned again. "Well, I suppose the train's the only thing, then. Thanks!"

With a grim mental chuckle, he sauntered onward.

The railway seemed to be his only course; but he'd have to find the train soon, or prepare for another sojourn in jail! He—he stepped aside very abruptly and allowed a huge racing-car to pass him at something like seventy miles an hour!

And as the dust died down, and he crossed the shady street, a genuine inspiration struck Clifford: the automobile!

That could get him to the Windy City in short order—in even shorter order, he imagined, than the steam-cars. And what was more, it could take him on a route that wouldn't include Downsford. And even if that was impossible, he could shoot through Downsford at night in entire safety and—

Well, naturally, the first thing was to get the automobile! That consideration struck him rather abruptly, and his soaring hopes sagged slowly toward the ground.

Did Hempfield own a garage? If so,

did the garage contain anything that could make over ten miles an hour? And supposing that the garage and the car existed, where the dickens were they located?

Far out of the park now, he stared around animatedly. And almost before him appeared the sign:

HEMPFIELD AUTOMOBILE COMPANY.

Cars Bought, Sold, Stored;
Rented, and Repaired.

It was, he thought, almost too good to be true! For a minute or two he regarded the sign; then he walked forward and entered the big door with the "No Smoking" sign.

A person fittingly covered with grease stepped out to meet him in the gasoline-scented depths of the big place.

"Got a good road-racer here to let?" Clifford inquired tersely.

"Some!" responded the greasy gentleman with equal shortness.

"Proper chauffeur to go with it?"

"We've got one or two of the best men in the State."

"Give me the best of the two, then, and let's have a look at the car?" concluded Mr. Clifford calmly.

The greasy gentleman sat down on the gasoline barrel. Palpably, he was slightly startled.

"What do you want to do, mister? Just take a quick ride around the country?"

"I'll probably want to take a quick ride as far as Chicago, at least."

"Er—huh?"

"Chicago. And I want a man that can drive and a car that can be driven. And, if it's all the same to you, I'm not anxious to stand around here for the next day or two."

The apparent proprietor arose and scratched his head.

"That—over there—" indicating a tremendous machine with a bonnet slightly under fifteen feet in length—"that's the fastest thing in the place, mister. It's out of commission now, and I'm waiting for the men to come and put it back in shape."

"How long'll it take?"

"Most likely an hour or two, if they ever get here. Meanwhile, if something a little slower'll satisfy you, there's a pretty slick little Dunmore car right there."

Clifford looked it over with an eye that wasn't altogether amateurish; and after a minute or so he nodded, with:

"Good for thirty on the average road?"

"Beat thirty-five easy!"

"Got a driver here now?"

The laconic quality of the conversation seemed to strike into the gentleman in the greasy overalls. He merely turned and pressed a button—and in a second or two a stalwart young person stepped quickly out of what appeared to be the back door of the office and hurried toward them.

"Get that car ready to go out, Bill! This gentleman is going to Chicago, probably."

Bill stared slightly. The soiled proprietor held him back for a moment.

"Want me to send word home for you?"

"Well—you better."

"And when you do send word," Clifford supplemented, "say that he may not be back for a week."

Proprietor and chauffeur stared together at the stranger. The chauffeur seemed to understand more quickly, for he nodded and hurried over to the little white car, with its two small seats and its one large engine.

He tinkered with it for a while, as Clifford made terms and paid the price. One hundred good dollars went down for the use of the car—and a minute or two after they had been paid the car itself began to emit a series of frantic chuggings and to back around slowly.

"I suppose you can lend me a duster and a pair of goggles?" Clifford inquired.

They came forth at once, and the car halted beside him as he donned them and, with a little shudder, pulled down the hat that had belonged to Elthorpe.

Wholly equipped, he turned and nodded to the owner of the place and stepped into the car; and the lively bit of machinery slid suddenly out of the garage, its driver looking stolidly ahead.

There was something fascinating in the manner with which a swift motor-car disregards everything else on earth. Clifford gained the sensation within five minutes after leaving the garage, for the little white car skimmed over the surface of Hempfield as if the streets had been laid solely for its benefit.

Baby-carriages were backed suddenly. Horses decided not to cross the street just yet. Elderly ladies retreated to the curb and watched amazedly.

And, meanwhile, the little car shot forward without a sound; and in some five or six minutes it had left Hempfield behind and was bowling swiftly through green ways.

Bill seemed wholly intent upon business. Clifford glanced at him once or twice, with an idea toward conversation, but it was nearly a half-hour before he hazarded:

"How long is it going to take us to make Chicago?"

"Fifteen or twenty hours, if we keep straight on and nothing busts."

"Can you steer clear of Downsford?"

"Sure."

"Do it."

Bill slowed down a trifle as he half-turned toward his passenger.

"Are we going to run all night, or are we going to put up somewhere?"

"Well—we'll see later on," said Clifford.

The pedal went down again, and a lever as well, and genuine speed began to emanate from the four big cylinders. Fields, houses, lanes, and patches of woods were vanishing behind in clouds of dust. Hempfield itself was far back now, and dusk coming on in good earnest.

Without comment, the driver ran his car to the side of the road and stepped out with matches. A minute or so, and the gathering gloom was illumined by three pencils of brilliant white—and the car went on.

Some two hours passed in silence, broken only by the steady whirl of the engine. Black night had come now, and cloudy night at that. Fences appeared only in weird, moving patches, thirty yards ahead, as the lights struck them. Farmhouses were no more than so many collections of flitting yellow squares.

Now and then they whirled through

a town, slackening only slightly and earning heartfelt curses from outraged citizens. Now they were in the open country again and making real time once more.

The country had taken on a rolling character. One low hill succeeded another; one valley seemed to be waiting and traversed almost before they had left the last—and with the apparently endless series of climbings and descents, an extremely odd sensation began to come over Clifford.

It was rather akin to that peculiar intuition that sometimes strikes one—the feeling that some one behind is staring at one. Half a dozen times, Clifford glanced over his shoulder furtively. Out of the half-dozen glances, five revealed two tiny spots of glistening white light, far, far back on the road they were eating up so satisfactorily.

And they seemed to be larger and nearer at every glance! Undoubtedly they belonged to another motor-car—but why, mile after mile, did they follow the same road? Why did they seem to be growing nearer and nearer? Why—where twenty minutes ago they had been topping one hill while Clifford sped over another—why were they now in the valley behind when Clifford raced over a ridge?

Palpably, there was a single answer: the little white car was being pursued!

CHAPTER XI.

A CHAT AND SOMETHING MORE IN THE WOODS.

ONE more look behind, and Clifford quickened to action.

"Is that car chasing us?" he inquired shortly.

"What car?"

The driver slowed a trifle and looked back. A snort of something almost like emotion left him.

"Looks it!" he observed exhaustively.

He made another survey of the lights and chuckled a little.

"That's our other fast car, sir," he stated.

"Eh? The one they were fixing?"

"That's the one! I know it on account of the lights. I brought them

lights from New York two months ago!" The assertion came with absolute certainty.

Clifford, however, begged to doubt.

"How the dickens can you tell lights that—"

"Because the boss wanted that pair of lamps for that car, mister, and he paid eighty dollars for them. That's the same pair of lights, because there's nothing else of the sort around here!"

"But—"

The car slackened again. The driver looked at Clifford in the blackness.

"Shall I wait for them?"

"What?"

"Well, I thought maybe there was a friend of yours in the—"

"Well, you think again!" snapped the passenger. "I don't know who's in that machine, but I know I don't want to meet him just now. *Go on!*"

Another little snort and the white car shot forward once more; and something in the atmosphere seemed to denote that its driver was offended.

It was a state of mind that Clifford could hardly afford. He located a twenty-dollar bill in his trousers' pocket and laid a hand gently upon the shoulder of his chauffeur.

"Young man," he said softly, "you're going to do some racing now, and I want you to make a *job* of it. Just stick that in your pocket and see if it'll make the car go any faster!"

The chauffeur softened suddenly.

"Thanks," he remarked. "But—say, I may be wrong about that being our car; but if it is, *this* thing won't ever get away from it, if it wants to come up with us."

"Are you sure?"

"I'll be a darned sight surer ten minutes from now," the driver chuckled grimly. "Sit back and hold tight!"

It was eminently good advice. A rattling of mechanism, and the white car fairly bounded over a new ridge and roared its way down into the black depths of a new valley!

Mr. Clifford hung on in every sense! There were times, during that descent, when he wondered whether any mortal had ever traveled faster than he was going at that particular moment.

The road dipped unexpectedly. The

car all but flew through the air in its course. And, then, as they struck a lighter grade, Clifford looked behind again—and those wretched lights were half way down the hill and bouncing from side to side!

"Say! They're coming to beat the devil!" he shouted.

"They'll have to come, mister, if they are!" his driver cried back. "If that's our car, it can beat this in a walk—and that's going some!"

"I should say it was, but—"

A long, squawking "honk! honk!" reached them from behind! The driver bent forward for an instant, and—set back again. The little white machine was doing everything on earth that could be dragged out of her.

The blare of the horn came again—and this time almost in their ears.

And Clifford's driver steered diplomatically for the right side of the road and cried:

"They're going to pass! They're—"

A new blast from the horn drowned his voice. The road ahead grew suddenly brilliant with the light of the lamps on the other car, and the shadows of Clifford and his driver loomed up abruptly as long, black streaks.

That other car—whatever it might be—was within a dozen yards! And the stolid Bill slowed down suddenly and skirted the ditch so narrowly that Clifford all but lost interest in the pursuit, if pursuit it happened to be.

And, then—so swiftly and so neatly that it was over almost before the occupants of the little white racer realized what was occurring—the big car with the big lights, fouled them squarely!

A long gray bonnet appeared before them and Clifford's driver jammed down his brakes and made some impolite remarks to the trees of the wooded patch into which they had run. The big car, evidently, was anxious to run straight into the ditch, and—

And Clifford's car stopped short, with the other machine at a standstill in front of him.

As a piece of automobile driving, it was all, doubtless, very neat and very interesting. As a means of interruption to a Chicago trip, it was very near to maddening, and Clifford's lips had opened

to deliver an appropriate sentiment or two when his driver called pithily:

"Say! What in blazes are you trying to do?"

"Back up, Bill! It's all right!" said a voice from the other car.

"Is—"

"It's me—Flynn, Bill!"

"Well, what—"

"This is what the gent ordered, old man!" came back to the little white car laughingly.

"Well, get out of the way, there!" Clifford's driver roared.

"Couldn't think of it. He wants me to block you and—"

There was a low, growling mutter in the darkness, and the voice stopped suddenly. There was also a little rustling in the other machine; and in the reflected light of the lamps a tall figure stepped out of the thing and came straight for the white car.

Instinct took Clifford out of his seat at a bound. Quivering, wondering, he landed on the road and—faced Mr. Elthorpe!

A variety of emotions raced through the trust-builder with such speed that he was all but dazed.

Elthorpe wasn't dead at all! Indeed, he seemed very much alive just now. He limped slightly as he loomed up in the dim, ghostly light, but—there could be no murder charge against Clifford.

And as swiftly his mind swerved over, and he took to wondering at lightning speed just what Elthorpe was doing here and—

"You didn't know you were up against a really capable man, did you?" inquired Elthorpe's voice.

"Well, I—"

"But you are, just the same. . . . Ouch!" Elthorpe caught his breath. "You gave me one lovely little flesh wound in the leg, Clifford; but the doctor fixed it up, and this car was fixed up at about the same time, and I got full particulars about your interesting flight and caught you."

He paused for an instant. Then he pursued:

"I'm risking peritonitis or gangrene or tuberculosis, or something of the sort, by following you; but I decided to do it, just the same, and now you and I are

going to have a little heart-to-heart talk. Come and take a stroll with me."

Clifford cleared his throat.

"Just one minute, Elthorpe," he said quietly. "I want to put these goggles in the car and—"

He stepped swiftly back to his own machine.

With a pinch he caught the attention of the driver and whispered hurriedly:

"I may be going to have a little bit of trouble here. Take a wrench or something else heavy and keep twenty or twenty-five feet behind me; and if you have to do a little strenuous work, you won't lose anything by it. Understand?"

"I'm wise," said an answering whisper.

Clifford turned back and gulped a trifle; all told, the complications of the last few days were getting rather on his nerves, but—

"If you can just spare me a minute or two of private conversation?" suggested Mr. Elthorpe with acidity.

He headed up the road, in the light of the lamps. Clifford, cautiously as might be, fell into step beside him.

His right eye remained fixed upon the gentleman of the opposition; and the view was not altogether comforting, for Elthorpe's hands rested quietly in the pockets of his long duster—and there were unpleasing suggestions as to what those pockets might contain and what Elthorpe's next intention might be.

Apparently, it was one strictly of business; for when twenty yards separated them from the cars his voice came softly:

"You've handed me a deuced nice deal—eh, Clifford?"

"What?"

"I was ready to let you go free."

"To—eh?" For the moment, the late gentleman from Altoona had departed altogether in his mind, in the relief at finding Elthorpe alive.

"I was—absolutely. If you'd behaved like a business man and a gentleman, I was ready and anxious to let you go loose, and even to finance your way out of the country."

The calm tone rendered Clifford breathless for the moment. Mr. Elthorpe went on somewhat tensely:

"And after killing one man and—"

"You know as well as I that I never—"

"Piffle!" sneered Mr. Elthorpe. "After getting clear from one scrape, you had the infernal audacity to have a pot-shot at me, eh?"

"Elthorpe! I—"

"Well, *now* you're going to get yours on both counts!" said Clifford's late friend.

He laughed shortly as he rested a foot on the stump of a tree by the roadside.

"You've done it! You've done for yourself, when you might as well have had money to start life over again somewhere in Europe—or Asia or Africa, if they struck you better. You've done it, and now you lose and I win. Is it *quite* clear?"

"No!"

"Dense, dense young man!" Elthorpe yawned. "Here! Don't start like that, sonny. I've got a gun in both pockets about now, and I'll plug you cheerfully. In fact, there's a reward of something like two thousand for your return to Downsford."

"Alive or dead, I presume?" said Clifford acidly.

"Search me!" replied the classical Elthorpe. "I suppose one's as good as the other, in a case like yours."

He chuckled slightly at his own dismal wit, then straightened up, and his voice grew sharper.

"We won't spend the night discussing the matter, however, Clifford. Hand out those papers of yours, and do it quick!"

Mr. Clifford moistened his lips.

"And supposing that I do?"

"I'll squat down here beside the road and give you the faster car of the two; and I'll give you three hours to get loose at that," responded Elthorpe magnanimously. "Hustle!"

"And supposing that I don't choose to hustle?" the voice of the trust-builder came almost lazily through the blackness.

"Then you're going to ride back to Hempfield or forward to Downsford, whichever may be nearer; and I've got the means here to enforce the little scheme." The somewhat familiar glitter of a blue-black barrel shone faintly in the gloom.

Whereupon Clifford's brain seemed to revive and to go genuinely to work.

Here was the infernal pistol that had perforated Elthorpe that afternoon. Was it due to perforate *him* now, or—or wasn't there some way of handling Elthorpe for a while, and—

Clifford laughed suddenly and, apparently, with genuine merriment.

"Bosh, Elthorpe!" he said. "Put that confounded thing up, will you? Stick it in your pocket—drop it on the ground or anywhere else, but don't stand there like a Wild West hero. If you want to talk business—well, I'm not prepared to say that I'm not willing to listen to reason *now*. I'm about as sick of the job as a man could be, you know; and this thing of having half a dozen murders daily on the side is likely to get on one's nerves, and—"

And Elthorpe had thrust the pistol back into his pocket. Elthorpe had taken the bait for the moment as neatly as any little fish that ever rose to hook.

A second or so Clifford held his breath. Then, in the flare of the white lights, he shot through the air toward Elthorpe. A grip that was as much excited determination as actual muscle, and the gentleman of the pistols had been gripped hard by both wrists and twisted around.

And the second wrestling match of the day having consumed perhaps fifteen seconds, Elthorpe was upon his face, with Clifford atop, and Clifford was shouting:

"Bill! Bill! I say! Bill! Come—"

A figure rushed into the light toward him, but it was a figure in a gray duster and not a yellow one. A second figure followed within a yard or two.

Its arm went out sharply—and the first form crashed down into the dust of the road. With lightning intuition, Clifford understood that his own driver had placed Mr. Flynn out of the running.

He gasped hard as he clutched the wriggling, cursing form of Elthorpe. He bore down and all but gurgled:

"Bill! Tie him! Get—"

The yellow figure vanished swiftly, and the struggle went on. A matter of thirty seconds, and Clifford's driver was back with some dozen feet of rope in his hands, and was asking grimly:

"Want to leave him here?"

"Yes!"

"Give me that wrist—the right one."

"Get the guns out of his pockets first. The side-pockets."

The chauffeur bent over. There were two flickerings in the bright beams of light—and Bill was bending closer interestedly.

The pistols had been eliminated by the simple process of hurling them into the deep brush, and Bill's fingers were busy with a noosed rope.

"I know the trick all right!" he whispered. "Gimme that wrist, mister!"

A snarl and a roar from Elthorpe, and the line had been knotted hard about the wrist; and Bill was chuckling breathlessly as he planted a knee in the victim's back and reached for the other hand. Another deft twist or two and the hands were cinched firmly together, as the pleasant little chauffeur remarked calmly:

"What are we going to do? Tie to a couple o' trees or drop 'em in the bushes?"

"You haven't killed that—that Flynn?"

"Flynn'll be up and raising Cain in half a minute, mister—you can't kill him! Sit on this one, please, and I'll—"

Clifford had no more than obeyed than his driver was gone with what rope remained. An instant, and he appeared dimly down the road, leaning on Flynn—and a wild, glorious volley of frenzied curses announced the fact that the vital spark remained in Mr. Flynn.

That unhappy person appeared very shortly, hands behind him, propelled by Clifford's driver, who dallied idly with a huge wrench.

"We'll walk 'em right up into the woods!" he directed. "You h'ist that fellow to his feet and—"

Clifford was obeying. A kicking struggle, a few clouds of dust, and Elthorpe stood erect, shaming the helpless, imperfect profanity of Mr. Flynn as he was forced across the shallow ditch and straight into the brushy hillside.

There was a climb of five minutes, putting many dozen yards between themselves and the road. There was a hurried descent to the road again, after another five minutes or so; there was a faint, lurid streak of unprintable corrupted

English that brought a chuckle to the chauffeur, and the cheery comment:

"They'll yell there till they bu'st, I guess! There ain't a house within a mile!"

After which there was a violent chugging of a huge motor; and—this time in Elthorpe's lengthy racer—Mr. Clifford and his driver whizzed onward in the midnight blackness again!

CHAPTER XII.

HAS GOOD LUCK TIRED?

If the little white car had flown, the big gray car seemed to have passed description as regarded speed.

Under Bill's deft hand the motor worked without a sound. The car skimmed blithely up the next hill, with a beautifully care-free regard for anything else that might be on the road.

A buggy, occupied by a couple of gentlemen whose souls seemed to have run to song after an evening of diversion, was steered straight into the ditch and overturned as Clifford passed. A misguided dog, issuing from a farmhouse some three miles farther on, passed to the dog heaven without a murmur or complaint.

A red-lighted saw-horse, doubtless placed across the thoroughfare to indicate repairs, went into kindling wood as its lamp exploded—and the gray car was bouncing wildly over crushed stones for another quarter of a mile, while its chauffeur heaped anathemas upon the man who hadn't invented forged steel tires.

A herd of cows turned and tore down bars and fences as the gray demon shot past and bovine instinct pointed toward flight.

The car, however, went on placidly at something over a mile a minute, and Clifford's brain began to find some of the exhilaration in this wild careering across country.

He was loose again—and again on his way to Chicago! He had the faster car, too, and Elthorpe was tied to a tree, and his chauffeur with him; and by the time they managed to extricate themselves from the mass of towing-rope that lashed them to the trees they'd be hopelessly behind.

Mr. Clifford crushed Elthorpe's soft hat into his pocket and shouted soundlessly as his hair fluttered back in the rush of wind. Luck seemed to have walked hand in hand with him during the last twenty-four hours.

Something of the shout, as it seemed, reached the driver, for he slowed down somewhat and roared:

"All right, boss?"

"Very much!"

Another crunching of gears, and the driver's voice came again; and this time in a bubbling laugh:

"Say! This affair makes the other look like an ice-cart—eh?"

"I should say it did, but—can they get loose?"

The car slowed down still further, until it was making hardly more than ten miles an hour, and all nature seemed suddenly to have grown stagnant.

"That pair won't get loose till somebody comes along with a knife, and you can take my word for it. I didn't run away to sea a few years ago not to know how to tie ropes, you bet!"

"But if they should get loose?"

"What if they did? They couldn't catch us."

That proposition apparently settled satisfactorily, the gray phenomenon made another mad dash at the landscape, and Clifford found himself bracing hard to avoid an ignominious dive into the road.

Fifteen minutes, and breath seemed to have left him. If the little car had been a racer, this affair was simply a breath-paralyzer, and his goggles were in the other car and—

"Hey! Slow down a minute!" he roared.

Gently the speed abated.

"Bill," gasped Clifford, "we've got to stop somewhere for a few hours sleep!"

"Just as you say."

"Where, then?"

"Well, we can take the rubber covers and sleep under 'em on the ground, if you like. It doesn't look so much like rain now as it did—quite."

"But it looks almighty like rain, all the same, and I'd prefer a roof over me. Isn't there some out-of-the-way place around here—or don't you know the neighborhood?"

The car slowed down until it was little more than crawling; its chauffeur seemed to be pondering.

"There's Bowers's place," he suggested at last.

"Where's that?"

"Up a grass road, a mile or two from here. It ain't much for a hotel, but Bowers is a decent cuss, and I guess we can get something for the night, even if we do have to ring him out of bed."

Clifford thought for a minute.

"Well, steer for Bowers's place, if it's well off the beaten track, Bill."

By way of answer, the car continued its comet flight for two or three minutes. It halted, then, and the lights were turned on a road whose slight traffic seemed to be indicated by an untrodden line of green grass between two lines of fences.

The chauffeur grunted his satisfaction and steered up the lane; and in the course of half a mile a dim light appeared, and after another cautious survey of the path, the car rolled slowly up to it.

Bowers's, seemingly, was not a hugely patronized hotel; indeed, it appeared to Clifford that there was as much excuse for a hotel here as there would have been in the middle of the Sahara Desert.

Yet, one or two toots of the horn caused the opening of an upper window, and a really friendly voice called out:

"Who's that?"

"We're from Kent's, down at Hempfield!" came the calmly assured voice of Bill. "Can you put us up for the night?"

"Say! There ain't much night left now, but—" The head drew back. "Wait a minute."

A pause, and bolts rattled audibly. A door opened on the side porch, and the car made silently toward it—to find a gentleman in slightly modified night-clothes holding a lamp above his head with one hand and shielding a yawn with the other.

His eyes opened more widely as the car came into view.

"Bill!" he exclaimed.

"It's Bill, all right!" chuckled the chauffeur. "Goin' to put us up?"

A long, low peal of thunder drowned his voice.

The man on the porch advanced, the lamp still held over his head, a sleepy smile on his countenance. A gust of wind whizzed out of the west in sudden chill, and sent the lamp flickering.

As it passed, Mr. Bowers was at the side of the car with a more or less cordial:

"I imagine we kin fix you up all right, Bill. Only got one room left t'-night. T'other two has a couple o' drummers asleep in them—harvestin' fellers, or something—but this one's got two beds."

The porch lighted up suddenly with an electric flash from the heavens, and another roll of thunder followed, louder and more threatening than the first.

Mr. Bowers yawned.

"You better get that thar engine out t' the barn if you don't wanter get wet, Bill!" he suggested. "I'll take the gent up-stairs."

Clifford stepped to the porch. Bill nodded, and rolled slowly toward the rear regions of the little establishment. Bowers held open the door, and rubbed his eyes again, with:

"You missed a putty good wettin', mister. Right up this way, please. Room's most likely ready."

The clean smell of a really clean country house fell gratefully on Clifford's nostrils as he ascended the narrow little white stairway. It grew to a positive pleasure as Bowers opened a door on the upper floor and revealed a wide room with two wide beds.

"I kin dig up something t' eat, if you want it, mister?" he suggested.

"Don't bother about me," said Clifford. "If Bill wants anything to eat, give it to him down-stairs. I'm going to bed!"

"All right."

"And remember, please, that we'll have to get out of here by dawn!"

"All right, mister. I'll see ye're called around five."

Bowers shuffled away sleepily, after lighting Clifford's lamp.

Clifford himself sat down on the edge of one bed and unlaced his shoes, his coat and duster thrown off.

They dropped to the floor with a pleasant disregard of any one who might be below; and Clifford scuffed his way

to the open window and sat down in the gusty little puffs of breeze that were blowing in at intervals from the inkiness without.

Despite the growing frequency of lightning flashes, there was a soothing calm about this isolated little hostelry, with its three rooms and its cleanliness. There was something conducive to thought and retrospection—and retrospection was a luxury Clifford hadn't enjoyed in the last few hours.

Now he seemed able to look the last day over calmly, and to examine future probabilities with a reasonable degree of placidity.

He was doubtless under indictment for murder. Well, he'd left that some distance behind, for the present.

Very likely, though, it would please Elthorpe to add an assault charge to his troubles—if Elthorpe ever broke loose from that tree in the woods.

So that, if he made Chicago by Thursday, he could expect to return to a reasonable amount of genuine trouble!

He wondered what Mr. Harding was doing about now. He wondered what Barton—or whatever his name might be—was accomplishing in the detective line, back there in Downsford. He wondered what the papers were saying about him—what the district attorney's office was doing—what the brother of the late gentleman from Altoona was doing, too, in the way of locating the desperate criminal who hadn't committed murder.

He wondered what new freak of fate was going to turn up, and he wondered whether he'd be able to slide over it as successfully as he had passed the former freaks.

And, abruptly, he ceased to wonder, for a flash of lightning came so violently that he darted instinctively away from the window for a second; and when he sat down again, a fairly tropical thunderstorm was raging on the porch-roof without, and something akin to a torrent of water was splashing into the room.

Some few minutes later the chauffeur entered, wiping crumbs from his mouth with a solicitous:

"Didn't you want anything t' eat?"

"Not for mine," said Clifford absent-

ly, as he watched the cataract pour against the window.

"Sorry I have to bunk in with you, mister," hazarded the driver.

"Don't you worry about that, Bill," responded Clifford with a slight smile. "You seem to be a pretty good kind of sport."

"Oh, I can do what I'm paid for," grinned the chauffeur easily.

He walked to the window thoughtfully and regarded the downpour.

"You sorter wanted t' shake off them gents we tied up in the woods, eh?"

"Well, I'm not anxious to have their company."

"Lord's playing into your hands, ain't He?" chuckled the driver.

"Eh?"

"Say! If this thing keeps on for ten minutes more, there won't be a wheel-track in the whole county! Nobody'll ever be able to follow our trail."

"Sure?"

"Surest thing you ever knew." The chauffeur started, chuckling, for his own bed. "*Sherlock Holmes* himself couldn't guess where we are now, if he got his information from them gentlemen in the woods, mister."

Gray light is rather likely to awaken a man with nerves.

Clifford opened his eyes to see a gray sky, with a tint of rose color peeping in through the window.

He sat up with something of a start.

In the other bed the chauffeur was snoring smilingly. He hopped to the floor and shook him—and Bill sat up.

"Eh?"

"Good morning," said Clifford. "It's light. We'd better get going again. I've got to land in Chicago to-day."

"Clear"—yawn—"weather?"

"Perfectly."

The driver rolled deftly from under the covers and grinned sleepily.

"Get dressed, mister," he said. "I'll be ready by the time you are."

Clifford made for such clothes as he had discarded overnight. When he had finished the hastiest toilet of his life, he heard from the doorway:

"I'll go down and see if they've got any coffee or stuff ready. If they have, I'll bring it up here and—"

And he was gone. Clifford sat down on the edge of his bed and blinked. He seemed to have caught about as energetic a chauffeur as could have been desired; and if the young person landed him in Chicago properly, he decided that he should be rewarded in fitting shape.

Meanwhile, it might be as well to comb his hair and essay a little early morning wash, and he went to work whistling. Somehow, the impression was growing in his mind that indomitable luck was walking side by side with him.

He ducked into a thoroughly cold basin and combed his hair. He put on his collar and made a mental apology for the amount of Ohio soil that had collected upon it; he tied his tie, and yawned in luxurious anticipation of a possible cup of hot coffee.

And he ceased to yawn very abruptly and stared at his reflection in the mirror as his ears pricked up suddenly.

Somewhere outside was the violent

chug-chug of a big motor, and nowhere in the range of human possibilities could he find a good reason for his own car getting into commission so soon.

He listened again.

The puffing went on—there was a tooting automobile horn—and the meter of the puffing changed and suggested very strongly that a car had stopped directly before the hotel.

Mr. Clifford's face whitened. He turned toward the window; and as he did so the door burst open suddenly, and Bill appeared, wide-eyed and excited.

"Hey!" he cried softly.

"What is it? Who—"

"Look out that window and don't let 'em see you."

Clifford hurried across, and a foot or two from the window looked downward.

There stood the little white car they had abandoned in the early hours of the morning.

(To be continued.)

A MOMENT OF GREATNESS.

By J. S. FENDER.

The inspiration of the manager at a critical point
in the fortunes of Dent's All-Star Comedians.

IT certainly was a discouraging moment as I stood on the dismal-looking stage, in a little town in Kentucky, and read the warning scrawled in large, crazy-looking letters on the seamy side of the curtain: "All ye who enter here abandon hope."

A casual glance about would have been proof positive of the truth of the line. I did not need to look. I could smell hopelessness in the air.

And my dejection was further enhanced by conditions in the company with which I was then touring, or rather scrambling, over the country.

"Dent's All-Star Comedians," it was called. We had been out seven weeks, and had been fortunate enough to get one week's salary during that period. Things were taking on a more and more serious complexion. The manager had left his trunk in the last town as security

for his hotel bill, which further added to our discontent.

"This is the end," I reflected, as I stood there fascinated by the sign, and listened to the driving rain, beating ominously upon the tin roof over my head.

"Here is the reality of the old, old theatrical story," I told myself. "How many times I have heard old-timers talk about when they were stranded!"

Not a penny in the world. Not one glimmer of hope shining upon my hapless future. I saw starvation creeping slowly but inevitably toward me. Hunger! I knew it only too well. What was I ever to do?

I moved slowly toward the back of the stage, in the direction of the row of rooms which resembled stalls for wild animals rather than places to dress.

I stopped before number five, the last room in the row. This was mine. I

opened the door on a sickly, belated gas-flame, burning in a yellow jet in the corner, and a dirty, rusty wash-basin propped against the wall on a shelf, which extended the entire five feet of the enclosure.

With a feeling of utter disgust and wretchedness I turned away, and started for the stage-entrance.

I had not advanced more than ten feet, when Mr. Sills, the manager, burst in with a wild look on his face, his hands thrust to the very bottoms of his overcoat-pockets, and rain dripping from the brim of his black slouch-hat.

"Have you seen Holt, Saunders, Kelly, or Miss Dean?" he exclaimed breathlessly.

"No," I replied, feeling the floor swaying beneath me.

The manager's face whitened, and his eyes bulged with anger.

"I guess the bunch didn't even get off the train!" he almost hissed.

"I have been to every hotel in the town in search of them."

"Where is Mr. Taylor?" I asked.

"The whole outfit has migrated, Cobbie, and we are up against it."

"Is there any kind of an advance sale?" I asked.

"Yes, the house is sold out. This is the first show here in three weeks," he retorted.

"Well, can't we do something, Mr. Sills?"

"Do? How in the world can you play a nine-part play with four people?"

It certainly looked impossible, but, nevertheless, I saw a chance for the rest of us to get the returns of that night. Something had to be done. I did not know what, but I was determined not to let the prospects of a few dollars slip from our grasp.

I never thought so hard in my life as I did that minute.

Mr. Sills was pacing the floor like a caged lion. I was standing in the position I had first assumed, pounding for all I was worth on a hundred impossible ways to get the profits of the big house.

"We will have to give back the money, Cobbie," sighed the manager at length, stopping before me.

"It is impossible, Mr. Sills," I almost yelled.

"There is no way out of it, my boy."

"Yes, there is, and we must find it."

"Well, find it," he sneered.

"I will."

"Perhaps you can play the five parts yourself?" he replied sarcastically.

Like a flash an idea came to me, but it seemed too ridiculous to explain at that moment.

"No," I replied quickly; "but I can do something about as good."

Mr. Sills looked at me with the expression of a drowning man who has been handed a thread and told to rescue himself.

"What is your plan, Cobbie?"

"You can play that part in the third act, can't you, Mr. Sills?"

"Yes, I guess I could stumble through it. I have seen that human tadpole, Kelly, play it often enough to remember the lines."

"That leaves four parts to be filled?" I remarked.

"Yes, only four," he rejoined, with a grimace of pity spreading over his face at my attempted scheme to give the show in spite of the great obstacle before me. Then he added, with a poor sort of smile:

"I suppose you are thinking of having the mayor or the town constable play that long part of Holt's."

It struck me that he was carrying his comedy a little too far under the trying conditions of the moment; and, besides, I had by this time seen my way clearly through the plan I had formed. So I did not purr my next observation in any still small voice.

"Give me a chance and I will do my best to get out of this trouble," I said.

"Well, what is your scheme?" he queried sharply.

I was about to explain when the sound of sobs and the quick swish of a woman's skirts made both of us turn toward the door.

Miss Morton, the leading woman, rushed frantically up to us.

"Oh, Mr. Sills," she wailed, "what are we—"

"Just a minute, Miss Morton," I interrupted. "We will get out yet."

"Oh, how?" she asked through her tears.

"We haven't time now to discuss it.

The house is filling up, and there is only twenty minutes before 'overture,'" I replied.

"Are you with me, Mr. Sills?" I added, turning to the manager.

"Yes, go ahead, Cobbie," he returned. "You can't make things any worse than they are."

"No, I surely cannot. Be back for the part in the second act, will you?"

And without further debate on the subject, I sailed for my dressing-room on the wings of desperation.

I spent the next twenty minutes in pulling everything out of my trunk and in going over the lines of four parts.

I was to appear as the villain in the first act. That would be easy; because I had always wanted the part, and had watched Mr. Holt play it many times. I was familiar with every line.

My difficulties would begin in the second act and grow to an appalling climax before the finish of the third. I was busy making-up, revolving things in my mind, and growing more apprehensive of my success every minute, when:

"First act. Places everybody," somebody called.

I made a few last touches to my make-up, pulled on a black wig, grabbed a pair of gloves and a riding-stick, and arrived at my first entrance just as the curtain rose.

With trembling fingers and quaking knees I waited for Miss Morton to finish her first speech.

After a few minutes, which seemed eternities to me, she spoke the cue, and I entered. Facing a packed house for the first time in a season, and under the conditions in which I was placed, can only be fully appreciated by some one who has gone through a similar experience. This one stood out before me like a great monster, waiting placidly for me to move before it attacked.

I attempted to speak, but my tongue was tied. The realization of the awful responsibility on my shoulders that night froze my blood. I glanced appealingly toward Miss Morton.

"You look bully," she whispered. "Go ahead."

With a mighty effort I pulled myself together and began the scene. It went on smoothly enough, and I waded through

the remainder of the act without serious mishap.

The curtain fell on absolute silence, except for a low buzz of dissatisfaction, which only ceased when the popular local pianist began drumming some song in the wrong key on a piano as much out of tune as were we four deserted Thespians, sweating blood, in the gloomy, ill-smelling stalls behind the scenes.

"Second act," sounded the call.

The music ceased, the curtain rose, and with a graveyard stillness the audience settled back to endure what might come next.

In the first scene I played the lead. It was an awful part, but I managed to get through with the lines, made several sheepish attempts to be funny, and several desperate ones to make love to the leading lady. The audience was not cognizant of either effort, however, and I made a safe exit.

There was only one redeeming feature about the ordeal, and that was the many changes I had to make. The people out front never got a chance at me.

The next scene only gave me six minutes to shift from the juvenile to a decrepit, bearded old customer.

I no sooner showed my face on the stage, than some little wretch in the gallery piped out at the top of his voice:

"Oh, look, here comes Old Blizzards."

The audience laughed for the first time that night, and the commotion was so loud all over the house that I finished the scene unheard.

The incident was not unfortunate in one way, for the last part of the scene I played with Mr. Sills. He was worse than I.

When the curtain fell, we faced each other; each realizing the ludicrous situation. We tried to smile.

"How would you like to be back at that ribbon-counter in New York, where you used to work, Cobbie?" he asked, with a droll expression.

"I would rather sell hairpins the rest of my life than do this again," I called out as I made my way to my room.

"Me, too," he replied.

And the inflection in his voice made me turn instantly.

He was gazing through the peep-hole of the curtain.

"They are leaving in bunches."

"Lock the back door," I cried breathlessly. "They are coming after me."

In a short time Mr. Sills came to my door. There was a hopeful light in his eyes and an encouraging smile on his face.

"Can you make the four changes in this act without a hitch?" he demanded almost sternly.

"Yes, if they will let me live to do it," I stammered.

"All right," he replied, and hurried away.

About five minutes elapsed. I finished adjusting the wig and dress of an old Irishwoman I had to play.

"Last act," groaned Reddie, the property-man, who couldn't learn lines.

I sneaked over to the left entrance, feeling more than uncomfortable in my abundance of clothes.

I had on three suits under the dress. Two of them had been made for a vaudeville sketch, which I had tried out once but never got "booked" for. The dress I found out in Kansas. It also possessed some mysterious wires for the purpose of lightning changes.

I was hoping with all my soul that the nerve-racking piano would soon cease and give me a chance to collect my courage before the curtain rose, when to my surprise the music stopped in the middle of a bar, and to my horror I heard Mr. Sills deliver the following speech:

"Ladies and gentlemen," he began, "I have the pleasure now to announce one of the most gifted young artists in America, Mr. Ernest Cobb—a versatile actor and the most remarkable imitator on the contemporary stage. In the next, the last, act of our evening's entertainment Mr Cobb will give you a marvelous imitation, both in make-up and acting, of four of the artists you have seen perform to-night in the two previous acts. He will make three complete changes, each occupying but two seconds."

Here the villain paused to permit his circus-ring harangue to take good effect. I stood petrified and cold. Great beads of cold sweat were running down my back. My chattering teeth sounded like the rattle-bones of an end-man at a minstrel show.

My first thought was to run for my life. That gallery crowd had been collecting rocks during the last intermission; I could feel it intuitively.

But I was fascinated by the clear, smooth voice of the manager as it fell again, like a death-knell, upon my ears.

"Mr. Cobb," he continued, "will first appear in a female rôle, depicting an Irish character. This part, written especially for Mr. Cobb, gives him a splendid opportunity to display the versatility of his art. Thanking you, ladies and gentlemen, for your kind attention, I will now leave you to enjoy the work of our talented young artist."

That was the straw which broke the camel's back. I grabbed up the folds of my old Irish costume and made one plunge for the door, which I reached in three bounds.

Good Heavens, it was locked!

Reddie, fearing for his own hide, had bolted and nailed it. I pulled and banged at the fastenings in an agony of fear, but to no avail.

"I'll crawl behind that stack of scenery," I decided. I was on my way to it, when:

"Cobbie, Cobbie," I heard the manager call.

Before I could reach the haven of refuge, he headed me off.

"Come on, come on. I've fixed it!" he fairly shouted.

"I guess you have. You want to see me killed," I wailed, and made another attempt for the scenery.

He grabbed me.

"Nonsense, nonsense, my boy. I have been in the show business twenty years. Spent ten with a circus. They won't know the difference. Take it from me, my boy—take it from me."

At this point Miss Morton came running up.

"Oh, Mr. Sills, what a flattering speech!" she laughed.

I made one more effort to save my life, and again I was frustrated.

"Ring up," commanded Sills.

And he dragged me to the entrance.

"Now imitate yourself," he said, and shoved me through the door.

There was intense silence. I paused to collect a semblance of self-possession. I had to face the music now.

Suddenly out of that instant's pause came a hoarse, rasping call from the gallery:

"Ah, take off that hat."

A roar went up from the audience.

For an instant it froze my blood, but suddenly my overpowering fear changed to anger—the rage of a cornered beast. I determined then and there to die fighting, and not like a calf.

I drew back my shoulders, put on the meanest expression I could, and marched to the center of the stage. I stopped.

"Ah, take off that hat," came again from the hoarse individual.

I turned my face to the gallery, and said quietly, after the applause died:

"I would give it to you, old man, if you had anything to put under it."

The remark had the desired effect—it turned the tide in my favor; for the applause lasted minutes. I waited some time after it ceased, just to give any one a chance to throw something or make any further comment about me. I was surprised to confront an absolute silence.

I began the scene in the dialect of the old Irish character, and played it to the end to an interested audience. On my exit there was genuine approval.

Before it had even begun to subside I was standing in the center door in the full-dress suit, black beard, and black wig of the heavy man. The change had been simple enough—just a matter of shifting wigs and dropping the dress.

The audience went wild. I took every

advantage of my opportunity and played the game for all it was worth.

"Can it be possible they think I am another person?" I asked myself.

The genuine appreciation convinced me of the truth. At the end of every speech with Miss Morton I received a hand, and finished the scene amid a thundering applause.

I pulled the wires of the dress-suit, adjusted the white wig and long beard, and in a slouch-hat reentered in less than ten seconds, which to the audience must have seemed like one. My hit was something for a real impersonator to envy.

It was the only time in my life I have had any experience of knowing how it seems to be great. I made an exit followed by a storm of applause.

In an incredibly short time I entered on the opposite side of the stage in the full juvenile automobile make-up. I met Miss Morton in the center, and, after a short scene, the curtain went down on the conclusion of the hit of my life.

I went to my dressing-room feeling like a real actor. I had not long to wait for the returns. Sills was back in five minutes.

"We get ninety dollars apiece," he said. "And we can leave on the one-twenty to-night for New York. Cobbie, the show business is a game of advertisement. When you tell them forcibly how great a fellow is, and just keep on saying it, spreading it on a little thicker each time, they will finally come to believe it."

LOST.

A TRAVELER in foreign lands,
A sojourner at home,
I never failed to find my way
Where'er I cared to roam.

Until one day (or dark or fair,
I'd tell you, could I know
If I shall ever tread the path
That leads—where I would go).

Of no avail is Baedeker,
Geography, or guide;
But there is one I'd wish to have
Enlisted on my side.

Oh, friend of lovers in despair,
Sweet Cupid, aim your dart
And show me what I fain would know;
The way—to Molly's heart.

Nellie Clare Carroll.

SHIPMATES WITH HORROR.*

By JOHNSTON McCULLBY,

Author of "Land of Lost Hope," etc.

Terrible happenings on a voyage that battled against
greater odds than the usual perils of the sea.

CHAPTER XVII (*continued*).

A NEW DISCOVERY.

"PERHAPS I could stop the tolling of the bell," she admitted. "But—"

"Well?"

"I have reasons for—for not stopping it."

"Can't you explain?"

"I— No, I cannot explain yet."

"Tell me why you cannot explain."

"I'm afraid."

"For yourself?"

"No."

"Ah! For some other, then? Then there is another person concealed below. Let's have him up!"

"I ask you not to attempt that," she begged. "I ask you not to question me now. I have done all I could for you—and in return you might let me keep my secret for a time yet."

"I did not mean to be discourteous," the captain answered. "Is it necessary that you keep your secret? Why should it be?"

"Perhaps there is a person below whom I do not wish injured," she said. "Perhaps it is some one I love."

"I'll say no more now," replied Benton. "For you have done so much for me."

She left him and went to the cabin. She intended to rest, but when she heard Rench groaning she tried to relieve his pain instead.

Benton walked aft to talk with Halsey.

"I can't make out that girl," he said.

"How is that, sir?" the second mate wanted to know.

"I asked her if she couldn't stop the tolling of the bell. She as good as admitted that she could, but wouldn't. I

tried to get her reasons, and she intimated that she was afraid we would make the chap below suffer if we got our hands on him."

"There's a man below, then?"

"It seems so," said Benton.

"But why shouldn't she go below and get him to come up? He'd be handy to have right now."

"I told her as much," replied Benton. "But she wouldn't listen to me. She intimated that the chap below was some one she loved, and that she wouldn't turn him over to us because she was afraid we'd make him suffer for the tricks he has played."

"Some one—she—loves!" Halsey gasped.

"Yes," the captain replied. "I suppose the blackguard, whoever he is, got her mixed up in this affair. But she loves him too much to give him up, anyway."

Benton went forward again. Halsey gripped the wheel, and looked off into the night. Some one she loved, the captain had said! Why, she loved him—she had told him so!

Jealousy entered the breast of Halsey, the first pang of the sort he had ever known. Tears sprang to his eyes—tears of rage and wounded pride. But he conquered his emotion, and tried not to think of her.

She had played with him; had said she loved him, had let him kiss her, as a sort of gratitude because he had saved her when the sea would have stolen her away.

He wouldn't act the part of a baby, he told himself. He would be the man, for just now he had a man's work to do. Here was the angry ocean, here the ship that bore him and some others through

*Began December, 1908, ARGOSY. Single copies, 10 cents.

the boiling waters, and his hand was at the helm. Yes, he was playing the part of a man; and he wouldn't act the baby!

He fought his emotion and the sea for the better part of an hour; then he saw her come on deck again, and walk toward him through the spray.

"Hallo, boy!" she said.

"Hallo!"

"Are you tired, boy?"

"No."

"Your face is white, boy. Are you ill? Were you hurt more than I thought?"

"I am hurt more than you think," he said, with double meaning.

"Oh, boy! Let me take the wheel, and you go to the cabin. Please, boy."

"The wheel is a man's work," he told her.

"But there is no man to take it?"

"No, there is no man to take it," he said bitterly.

"You must go to the cabin, boy. I'll stand by the wheel."

"It is a man's work, I have said."

"But there is no man, boy—"

"Because you will not make him show himself!" he cried, turning toward her for the first time. "There is a man below. The captain told me. But you'll not betray his hiding-place, and I know why."

"Boy! And why?"

"Because you love him!" he cried.

"You—who said you loved me, who allowed me to kiss you; who thus made a fool of me before the first mate! You are afraid he will be punished, and so you will not betray him—this man you love!"

"Boy! Boy!" she cried.

She was looking at him in a sort of wonder at his outburst. Tears sprang into her eyes, but she dashed them aside with her hand.

"You do not trust me, boy—do not believe me when I say I love you?"

"How can I, when you love him so much you'll not bring him on deck—even when we need a man as much as we do?"

"I do love you, boy! If you only knew!"

"But this other man you love—" he began.

Benton came upon them then.

"There's another stoker gone under,"

he said. "The work is killing them. And we can do nothing. I wish we had another man."

Halsey looked the girl in the eyes. She whirled upon Benton.

"There is a man below," she said. "If I bring him to you—if I make him work and help you to port, what will you do with him?"

"Give him a chance to escape when we get to San Diego," said Benton.

"You mean that?"

Benton laughed.

"He is nothing but a stowaway who played tricks to keep us from capturing him," he replied. "He has destroyed no property. The only possible charge against him, that I see, would be one of conspiracy, and we'd have to drag in Phelps to convict him of that; and we'd have to drag you in. And I wouldn't do that, after all you've done."

"You forget," she said. "Perhaps it was he who assaulted you and Mr. Rench below."

"That is my personal business, and I do not care under the circumstances to make him suffer for it," the captain answered. "Mr. Rench is not able to exact his revenge. The other men might give him trouble if they realized that he was the cause of all their terror, but I'll attend to that. That's what I meant when I said he'd have his chance to escape when we reach port."

"On your word of honor—" she began.

"On my word of honor," he replied firmly.

The girl looked at him, then turned and looked at Halsey.

"You shall see, boy," she said, as though in sorrow.

She took the revolver from the bosom of her dress and held it in one hand. Then she walked up to Benton.

"Open the hatch," she said. "I'll get you another man."

She followed Benton across the deck. The captain worked at the hatch fastenings, and she helped, and presently they were able to open the cover enough to admit the passage of her body.

"I dare not open it more," Benton said, "because of the heavy sea."

"It is enough," she told him. "Go back to the wheel; I'll bring him there."

"You'll not be in any danger?"

"No," she answered, and disappeared below in the darkness. She had refused a lantern.

At the wheel the two men waited without speaking. Half an hour passed, and still she did not return. Benton began to show anxiety. Halsey made no comment, but down in his heart he feared for her.

"I can't stand it any longer," he cried suddenly. "The brute has killed her!"

But as he spoke he saw the girl coming across the deck under the lights, a man behind her. They walked through the thick spray, and after a time came to a stop at the wheel.

"Here is your other man," she said to Benton.

The man held up his head, and the light fell upon his face. Benton uttered a cry, and Halsey echoed it.

The man was Simms—who had signed as second mate, who had disappeared when the rats left the ship; who, they all thought, had deserted because of his superstitious fears.

"You!" Benton cried.

Simms did not reply, but stood waiting as though for orders.

"I have told him what you have promised," the girl said to Benton. "He awaits your commands."

"Report to the engineer," Benton ordered. "I'll go along with you to explain, so Evans and Carter will not think they are seeing a ghost."

He led the way to the engine-room; the girl looked after them until they disappeared from view, then walked up to Halsey.

"Boy," she said, "I'll tell you my last name now. It is Simms. That man is my brother."

CHAPTER XVIII.

AT BREAK OF DAY.

"Your brother!" Halsey cried.

"Yes—boy."

And, then, before he could ask her forgiveness, she walked forward across the wet deck, and to the fore-castle, where she dressed the wounded man's knee again and tried to calm the aged maniac, who would not cease his chant even for her.

Then she crossed the deck again through the mist and spray, and went toward the engine-room. She met Benton coming up.

"So it was the man I signed as second mate that was below," the captain said.

"He is my brother," she replied.

"Your brother!"

"Yes."

"That was why you wished to protect him, then?"

"Yes, Captain Benton."

"And when will you explain all these mysteries?"

"When we are safe," she said.

"If we are ever safe," he answered in a low tone.

"Do not despair, captain; the storm is breaking now."

"That is welcome news."

He went on deck, and she followed him. There were indications that the storm was breaking, as she had said, but still the sea ran high, and the wind roared and shrieked, and masses of spray and foam drenched the ship and everything on her deck and above it.

In the light Benton could see Halsey's pale face as he struggled at the wheel. He wondered what caused it—whether the boy had really been hurt when he was rendered unconscious, and was keeping the pain to himself, or whether his wan appearance was due to exhaustion.

The girl went toward Halsey, and Benton walked forward, and stood looking out into the stormy night. Less than twelve hours he had now! And where was he? What would he see when the morning broke?

Would he be far out of his course, granted that the ship was still afloat, so far out of it that it would be impossible to reach port on time?

Despondency came upon him again. He stood to gain so much, and to lose so much! It seemed that everything had battled against him at first, and that the tide had turned in his favor too late.

He had a working crew now, in spite of the injured men in their bunks, but could even that save him?

He turned his eyes upward, and just then there was a rift in the clouds, one flash of moonlight. Perhaps it was a good omen, he told himself.

The girl had reached the wheel, and was looking at Halsey. After a time she stepped close to him, so close that she could hear his words above the roar of the storm.

"Can you forgive me, girl?" he asked.

"Yes," she answered. "But you'll not doubt me again?"

"I'll not doubt you again," he said.

"I'm glad for that, boy!"

And, unmindful of the fact that Captain Benton was looking, she bent forward beneath the light and kissed him.

Benton saw the caress, and his surprise was dwarfed by the recollection it brought to him. He thought of that other girl—waiting, waiting for him to vindicate himself and go to her; waiting with her simple, great faith in him.

"I've got to win!" he groaned.
"I've got to win!"

It was noticeable, now, that the fury of the storm had been spent. The wind abated, and though the waves rolled mountain high, they had a dying appearance.

The storm would go more quickly than it came. And then he would know the truth when morning broke. Win or lose—gain or loss—it was a question of a few hours now.

Simms was working below, and Bately had recovered sufficiently to do a little. Evans and Carter seemed more than human in the way they fought fatigue and kept the engines going. The two men in the fore-castle were sleeping, and would soon be ready for duty again, if needed.

The wounded man groaned as the ship pitched, and the maniac kept up his chant. And in the cabin Rensch lay in the bunk and cursed, and wondered where they were, and whether they would ever get to any port, on time or not.

An hour before daybreak the engines stopped suddenly. Benton uttered a cry and ran toward the engine-room. Carter met him at the door.

"It's all right, sir," he gasped. "They'll be going again in five minutes. We thought it better to shut them down for a few minutes than have them go to pieces. The storm is tearing them to bits, sir."

Much relieved, Benton stumbled back

to the deck. Though the engines were still, the ship made good time, flying like a wild thing before the storm. The girl was helping Halsey at the wheel.

It began to grow lighter, and the girl went forward to her post as lookout again, with instructions to tell Benton as soon as she sighted land, no matter where it lay. She had prepared no food, for no one thought of eating. All wanted to know the verdict, and every one hoped that the port would be near—Benton, because it meant so much to him; the others, because they wanted safety and rest after their long, tiring battle with the storm.

The old man tottered from the fore-castle again, but he did not chant aloud. He seated himself on the forward hatch, muttered to himself, and looked at the giant billows that tossed on every side.

Benton saw him pass a hand across his face and gaze about him in a peculiar way. In the next instant he was upon his feet. He looked back at Halsey, up at the girl, as though there was something he did not understand. Then he rushed back to the fore-castle.

The light of reason was in his eyes again.

"What—what is it?" he gasped.

"What's what?" demanded the wounded man gruffly.

"I—I— What has happened?"

"Well, of all the— Say, have you come back to life?"

"What is it?" the old man demanded.

The wounded man sat up in the bunk in spite of the pain he felt.

"There's luck for you," he said. "I don't suppose you remember a thing—eh?"

"Remember what?" asked the old man.

"You've been nutty. See? Out of your head! And we've had all sorts of mysterious things happen, and we mutinied and knocked out the captain and the mate, and went away in a boat, and were picked up and put back on board. And we've had the deuce of a storm. Yes—and you've been rushin' around talkin' about blood and bones, and howlin' because the rats left the ship."

The old man's eyes flamed.

"You're a liar!" he cried.

The man in the bunk did not even get angry; he laughed loudly, until a twinge of pain forced him to stop and groan instead.

"What's the matter with you?" the old man inquired.

"Bullet in my leg, that's all. I got gay with the second mate."

The old man would not believe until he went over and looked at the bandage.

"Holy Neptune!" he exclaimed finally, as the truth was forced home to him.

He turned and ran up on deck again, and went to Captain Benton.

"Cap'n," he said.

"Well?"

"They tell me I've been out of my head. Have I?"

"Rather."

"I hope that I—didn't do anything—"

"Never mind that," said Benton.

"You weren't responsible."

"But I'm all right now, cap'n. Anything I can do?"

"You can go forward as lookout, relieving the young lady."

"Aye, aye, sir!"

He started forward. But at that moment there came a cry from the girl:

"Land, ho!"

"Where away?" Benton cried.

"On the port bow!"

Benton rushed forward. Through the spray he could see the distant land in the coming daylight. But it was yet too dark to make out things distinctly.

He changed the *Calexico's* course a little, so she would run safely. Then he took up the watch, straining his eyes to catch sight of some landmark he knew.

Presently he saw the flash of a beacon. He watched it carefully, trying to read its message. But the spray hindered him. The girl watched, too, and the old man.

"On deck!" the latter cried presently.

"Forward!" answered Benton.

"I can make it out, sir."

"Well?"

"It's Point Loma!"

"Point Loma!" cried Benton. "Are you sure?"

"Aye, sir—'tis Point Loma. I know the light."

And then the morning broke clearly; and, as the mist lifted, Benton saw that it was indeed Point Loma, for away to one side were the Coronado Islands, and

to the other side was a great splotch of white against the green and brown of the land—the big resort hotel.

"Thank God!" Benton cried.

For before him lay the entrance to the bay of San Diego—and he had seven hours!

The storm had driven him from his track—the storm had carried him back again!

CHAPTER XIX.

WHAT OF THE FUTURE?

"You win!" the girl cried.

"Thanks to you," Benton said.

He called an order to Halsey, and the schooner's course was changed again. The engines were going, too, but Benton ordered half speed.

He wanted to approach the bar carefully, for the sea was running high and the passage was dangerous.

"If you'll come forward where no one else can hear," the girl said, "I'll answer any questions you want to ask."

Benton accepted her offer gladly and went forward with her, sending the old man aft.

"Begin," she said, smiling at him.

"Suppose you begin and tell me everything."

"There isn't much to tell, in spite of the fact that you think there is," she replied. "My brother was on the *Calexico* the first time she sailed, and I was with him. He did the same as he did this trip, and frightened the captain and the crew until they put back to port."

"Then you were ordered to take the *Calexico* out. It just happened that you ran across my brother and engaged him as second mate. He signed because that was an easy way to get on board, and while the rats were deserting the ship he took his kit and went to the hiding-place below."

"Just a moment—there are two things I want explained. How were the rats made to leave the ship?"

"Ferrets," she said, laughing. "We let half a dozen of them loose, and the rats lost no time in leaving the ship."

"And the hiding-place?"

"Under the gravel ballast in the bow, a big box covered with a trap-door, on

which there is six inches of gravel. There is a pipe which runs away to one side and lets in fresh air."

"When was that made?"

"Before the ship sailed the first time. Phelps knew the tight place the Howard firm was in, and he made his plans. There was plenty of time after the ballast was taken aboard and before the ship sailed the first time."

"Now explain the mysteries," Benton said.

"I want to explain first how we came to do it," she said. "My father worked for the Howard firm at one time, and I used to make voyages with him; that's where I learned all I know about ships and the sea. He was blacklisted by them, and it did him a great deal of harm. My brother and I care for our mother, and she has been ill for a long time; and we needed a good many things for her. And when Phelps offered us good money to work against you, we accepted because both of us hated the Howard firm. You see, we thought only of the firm."

"I went along for a special reason. We figured that, if we got in a tight place, I could show myself; and they wouldn't hurt me because I was a woman. Then my brother could remain hidden until we got to port, and they'd think I was the only one. You understand?"

"Yes."

"When I showed myself I played deaf and dumb—until you caught me by that trick—thinking that you would not question me if I did that. I was afraid, if I showed I could talk, that you'd force me to tell. I was afraid you'd hurt my brother."

"But the tricks—"

She laughed again.

"We came from our hiding-place, hurled the skulls up through the hatch, shrieked, and fired the pistol, then ran back before you could investigate. My brother crawled up and left that first skull on the deck. I put the pool of blood on your cabin floor. We had those things with us—the skulls and blood. At night my brother put the blood and skulls near the rail. It was easy, for you could not find us when you came below."

"And the tolling of the bell?" Benton asked.

She reached in her dress, took out a boy's sling-shot, and handed it to him.

"When a good-sized pebble is shot with that, and strikes the bell in the proper place near the rim, it is easily tolled," she explained. "We could see the bell from below when the hatch was open, and we simply shot at it and made it toll."

Benton was forced to laugh, too, at the simplicity of her explanation.

"But the skulls and the tolling when the hatch was closed?" he questioned, remembering.

"If you look at the hatch, you will see that there is an open space about a foot square, for the *Calexico* is an old boat and needs repair," she said. "We crept up to the hatch and shot our pebbles through the open space, and tossed the skulls through it, too, knowing we could get back to our hiding-place safely before you could unfasten and open the hatch and catch us."

"But why did you show yourself when you did?"

Her face flushed, and she did not answer for several moments.

"Because," she said finally, "my brother and I could not agree. When you came down to search, he slipped from the hiding-place and threw a skull and struck you. You remember?"

"Very well," said Benton, putting his hand to his head.

"He did it because he thought it would frighten the crew more. I quarreled with him about it. Then, when the mate came down, he struck the mate, too. Then I deliberately left him and followed you to the deck. But I acted the way I did because I didn't want to betray him. I left him, but I wouldn't have explained matters to you even if you had threatened me."

"When I got on deck and saw how courteously you treated me, I began to feel ashamed. Then I heard of the struggle you were having—and I heard about the girl. I wanted to help you then, for I knew we were fighting you more than we were the Howard firm. And so I did all I could."

"You saved me," Benton replied. "It is not my virtue that I have won."

"But it is," she said, "for if you hadn't been a clean, honest man, I would

not have helped you, and none of the others would have helped you. You won, Captain Benton, because you deserved to win; and now that you have won, I must remind you of your promise concerning the disposition of the crew and my brother."

"I'm a man of my word," Benton rejoined. "No harm shall come to any of them."

"After I told my brother how things stood, he came on deck willingly to help you. I was prepared to force him to come, but it was not necessary. And now we are nearing the bar, and I'd better go below. I suppose I shall have to hide until you get a chance to get me off the ship. Some of the firm may be waiting in San Diego."

She stopped to speak to Halsey before she went below.

"We are almost there, boy," she said, "and we are going to win."

"I have won already, girl," he replied, looking into her moist but exultant eyes.

"And Captain Benton has won. That other girl will be happy now."

"And you?" he asked.

"I shall be very happy, too, boy, with you."

And then she went to the engine-room to spread the good news, and afterward made her way to the cabin and told Rench.

"All hands on deck!" Benton was crying above.

The able-bodied men stumbled from the forecabin, and one stoker came up from below. Evans came, too, leaving Carter in charge.

"Good luck, cap'n!" he called in hearty tones.

But Benton was crying orders rapidly, for they were upon the bar and the water was a mass of churning foam about them. There was a moment's struggle, a moment of fearful pitching—then the *Calexico* rode safely into the harbor, her nose pointed toward the end of the island in the bay.

Through his glass Benton made out the Howard wharf. As he looked a flag was run up on it as a sign of congratulation, and the captain could see that Mr. Howard was standing there, wait-

ing for him to come in, with other men around him.

The head of the firm had come down by train to see whether he lost or won the contract, to find out whether or not Benton was to get that new ship and back pay, together with a complete vindication.

Benton turned and looked at the men on the deck.

"I'm going to command a new ship in a few days," he said, "and I want any of you who desire to, to sail with me. After we are safe at the wharf and I have talked with the owners, I'll explain all these mysteries that have puzzled you. Stand by the hawsers!"

The *Calexico* rounded the point of the island and swept toward the wharf. Benton glanced at his watch; it was ten o'clock. He could hear the cheers of the men on the pier now. They were cheering his victory, but they did not know all.

They did not realize what Benton had passed through, that he had conquered all obstacles, and arrived in spite of mutiny and conspiracy, with every man of his crew ready to drop with work for him. He hadn't won by use of strength of body, for his eighteen months of idleness had robbed him of that; but he had won by strength of character, as the girl had said.

The *Calexico* slipped alongside the wharf, and her hawsers were caught by eager hands. In a few minutes she was past, and Benton started aft to go ashore. On the way he passed Halsey at the wheel.

"I want you for second mate of that new ship I'm going to get," Benton told him.

Halsey's face grew bright as he heard the proffer, seeing in it his opportunity to make a home for the girl.

"Thank you, cap'n," he said, catching sight of Myrtle's face as she looked up on the deck. "I simply got to have a job!"

And two minutes later Captain Benton was grasping Howard, his employer, by the hand, and listening to his cheering words:

"Well done, Benton; that new ship is yours!"

Five Hundred Dollars or Nothing.

By ROBERT CARLTON BROWN.

How the chap who demanded one or the other of the above faced a prospect so serious as never to have entered into the calculations at all.

"I JUST got a telegram, and I've got to sail for London on business tomorrow," I explained to the landlady.

"My, this is so sudden!" she cried, it being her first chance to use the phrase.

"Yes, it is, rather," I admitted.

The telegram had been quite unexpected. It caught me at just the wrong time, for I had all of my money tied up in the business, and the only tangible cash I could get my fingers on was one hundred dollars.

My credit was all used up, and for a minute I thought of not going. But the pressing needs of business urged me on.

I had bought a little runabout to use in traveling around the city, and I suddenly decided to sell that.

Telephoning to several newspapers, I inserted an ad, offering the machine at a bargain.

The answers began dropping in on me at three o'clock that afternoon. Most of them were dealers, and they wanted the thing cheap. My price was five hundred—just the amount I needed; but the highest bid I received that afternoon was three-fifty.

Rather discouraged, I was almost inclined to accept the best offer, when a swarthy gentleman, with a bamboo cane and curled mustache, strolled into the office.

There was a prosperous air about him, and I set him down as a well-to-do Italian.

Approaching my desk, he drew a clipping from his pocket, and I recognized it as my ad.

"You have called about the automobile?" I asked.

"Yes," he replied; "I lak to buy it."

"I ask five hundred dollars for it, you know. I'll take you down and show it to you." My proposal was almost greedy; he was the first man that looked as though he would pay my price.

I hurried him into the elevator, and we descended to the curb, where the machine stood.

His eyes lighted up at the sight of it, and he showed a childish interest that amused me, as I explained the best points about the car.

I asked if he had time to take a ride.

Pulling out his watch, he replied:

"Eet ees now five-thirty. We go out to Westchester to supper; I know a good inn."

There were many things I would have to do before leaving the city for London, and I naturally hesitated. Then, realizing that I could not go without the cash to be obtained in exchange for the motor, I made a sudden decision, and we got into the machine.

On the way out, I used all of my persuasive powers of salesmanship, and finally he agreed to buy it for five hundred dollars cash.

Well, the meal was worth the eating after that, and we sat over it until eight-thirty.

Then he looked at his watch and drew himself together.

"We go get da money now. I haf friend dat leeve near here. I getta cash," the Italian announced.

That met with my approval at once, for I would be able to get back to the city in time to make a few arrangements for my trip.

Under his direction, we drove down a little country road before going through the village.

Stopping me at a turn in the highway, he explained that he would return in a moment with the money.

I waited not over five minutes, and then he came back, got hurriedly into the machine, pressed a roll of bills into my hand, and asked me how fast the car could go.

I gave him a practical demonstration

of the speed that my little runabout could put up, until we came to the Bronx. Then I slowed down and turned to him. He was smiling happily, and remarked:

"Vera good. I haf made money buying dees. Eet ees good to ride fast."

Turning down a lighted boulevard, I took the roll of bills and counted them. There were ten crisp fifty-dollar notes, and they meant a whole lot to me. Then I placed them securely in my wallet, and gave him the bill of sale we had made out at the inn.

In a very short time we arrived at my garage, left the machine, and went our separate ways.

I hurried at once to an express-office to buy five hundred dollars' worth of foreign money-orders.

Finding one open near by, I entered, passed the roll and my business-card to a clerk, and requested that the orders be given me at once.

Looking at my card, the clerk slipped it into his pocket, took the handful of money, and started into an adjoining room, where the drafts were kept.

I waited nervously, for my hurry was great. The lucky sale had brightened my spirits, and I was continually congratulating myself that now everything was fixed so that I could take the business trip that I felt would set me on my feet again.

A sudden explosion startled me. Several cries broke forth. An employee dashed from the room into which the clerk had gone with my money; in a second I was thrilled with the cry of:

"Fire! Fire!"

A burst of smoke bellied into the room, and a half dozen crazed clerks stumbled through into the outer office. Then the flames leaped to the door-casing, and into the larger apartment.

Several more men sprang through the door. Tables were knocked over; the sound of breaking glass and the crackle of fire seemed to be everywhere.

Possessed with the panic incited by the sudden conflagration, and seeing the stampede for the front door, I plunged ahead and dashed into the street. A horrid fear that my money had been burned up urged me to stay, and yet I ran on.

The garage was just around the corner. Recognizing the open door, I turned in and dropped weakly into a chair.

In a few moments I had recovered myself—the nervous fright had weakened me—but now I wanted to go back and find out the fate of my money.

Dimly I realized that the keeper of the garage was standing near me, and then I explained to him what my fears were.

"There was a man here looking for you just now," he told me.

"Was it the Italian that bought my machine?" I asked idly.

"No," answered the garage-keeper. "He came back with a friend a minute after you left, and they went away in the runabout."

Vaguely wondering who the man was that wanted me, and what he wanted me for, I dashed back to the fire, in the hope that there would yet be time to save my five hundred dollars.

With great relief, I made out the white face of the clerk to whom I had paid the money. He was standing on the edge of the crowd, watching the fire-engines at their work.

Running up, I cried:

"Did the money burn up?"

"Yes," he answered, recognizing me. "Everything did. It was an explosion that started it. It came all of a sudden—something in an express package blew up, they think. I had just laid your money on the—"

"Is your name Augustus H. Green?"

A short man had suddenly appeared between the clerk and myself, and asked the question sharply.

"Yes," I replied.

"Then you're under arrest!" he snapped in a low voice.

"What! What for?" My tone was tense.

"No time now. Come along," he ordered, grasping me by the wrist and leading me out of the crowd, as he added: "I'll tell you when we get out of here."

I looked around for the clerk, but he had disappeared at the moment the little man came up.

It was not an enviable position. I have never felt so hopeless in my life as I did walking to the station-house with that detective.

Here I was, my five hundred dollars gone, under arrest for I knew not what, and all in the short space of ten minutes. The London trip would have to be given up, and I would lose the big order at the end of it. Circumstances had changed everything. A moment before I had been happy and hopeful. And now!

Well, it was too hard to think of, so I turned to the plain-clothes man and asked:

"I want to know what I'm arrested for?"

"Oh, you don't know! Of course you don't know," he grinned. "You weren't over in Westchester in your auto to-night? Your auto number isn't New York 6235? You didn't stop at a bend in the road while your pal—"

He broke off as we came to the station, and went directly before the desk sergeant.

"Augustus H. Green, No. 2238 West Eleventh Street," the detective told him; and I winced at the sound of my name, as the man at the desk entered it on the docket.

"Charge?" came the formal question.

"Blackmail!"

I staggered back. Blackmail! I, charged with blackmail! I could not make head or tail out of it.

Here, thirty minutes before, I had been a law-abiding citizen, with five hundred dollars in my pocket, and the surety of sailing to London next day. Now I was under arrest, charged with a hideous crime, and the five hundred dollars was gone.

I was too dazed to resent, with more than a shudder, the search to which I was subjected. But I did notice the detective's discomfiture when nothing was found on me but business papers.

There being a night court, I was thrown into a cell for only half an hour. But that half hour was elastic. Try as I might I could make nothing out of the entire affair, except that the Italian who had bought my motor must have had something to do with my arrest.

The lost money staggered my senses, and it was impossible for me to think with my usual coolness.

Then I was summoned before the judge. He looked me over, and asked for the detective's story.

The plain-clothes man accused me of being a blackmailer he'd been trailing out in Westchester. It seems that a retired real-estate man out there had been intimidated into giving money for secrecy the past several months. When the worm turned he called in the detective, and a trap was laid.

The blackmailer had asked for five hundred dollars, to be left in the rural free-delivery mail-box, in front of the real-estate man's house, at nine that night. Ten marked fifty-dollar bills had been left instead of money that could not be identified. The man who called for the money surprised them, got away with the roll, jumped into an automobile and escaped.

Then it was explained that the detective caught sight of the number of the machine, looked it up, found it belonged to me, and then hired a fast car, went to my home and found the garage, because it was near by. There they told him that I had just brought the machine in, but that it had been taken out by the new owner immediately afterward.

Getting my description at the garage, he went out, and happened to bump into me at the fire.

That was the story. I understood in a minute. The Italian was the blackmailer, he feared the marked bills, took the risk of getting something for his money, and bought the motor with them, in order to throw the crime onto somebody else.

"Did you find the marked bills on the prisoner?" asked the judge.

"No; that's the worst of it. When searched we didn't find a thing suspicious, but he had had time to dispose of them," the detective replied.

Heavens, how thankful I was at that moment that the fire had occurred and deprived me of the five hundred dollars. The bills were destroyed, and they could give no proof against me except that I came in in the motor and the number was absolute identification.

Thanking Providence that I had lost the ten marked bills, and gaining fresh confidence, I told my story clearly.

The ad I had inserted that sold my automobile was shown to the judge. In answer to a message, the garage-keeper came over and swore that I had sold the

machine. There was nothing in my pockets that controverted the story. I told it straight, and the judge believed.

Summary discharge by the court was announced; and I was pronounced a free man, blessing my luck in losing the five hundred dollars. For if I had had that roll, my story would never have been credited.

Before leaving the court-room I gave a description of the blackmailer and of the machine in which he had escaped.

On his account I was out just five hundred dollars, and I wanted to see him get what he deserved.

Then I went home and thought the whole thing over. The courteous Italian had played a smooth game, and he had failed only because the evidence had been destroyed by the fire.

Despair crept into my thoughts as I considered the lost trip to London. But I gave it up cheerfully, realizing that I had escaped a mighty serious affair by losing the money.

In the morning I considered the advisability of taking the matter up with the express company. But I could not claim the marked bills. It was my money by rights; but somebody was bound to lose somewhere on the deal, and I decided to let the whole thing go.

In the early afternoon I was at my desk, buckling down to business with determination; but it was hard to throw off the thought of what I was losing.

The mail came. I opened several letters. Reading the card on the outside of one envelope, I suddenly tore it open to pull out a bulky bunch of papers and this letter:

DEAR SIR:

One of our clerks received five hundred dollars in currency from you last night in payment for foreign money-orders. This morning he found your business-card in his pocket and told of the case.

We therefore hasten to send you the money-orders, hoping that you will not be greatly inconvenienced by the delay.

The loss was regrettable, but we would not throw it onto your shoulders, as long as the money was lost by us.

Hoping that you will continue your valued patronage, etc.

The letter was signed by the express company, and five hundred dollars in foreign orders was enclosed.

Grabbing the notes, I jumped from my desk with a shout and whirled them around my head in happiness.

The telephone-bell brought me back to earth.

"Hallo!" I cried, in a high-pitched, excited voice.

"We've got the blackmailer; he has confessed," the good news came over the wire, "and we got your machine back, too; so you're all right, notwithstanding the mishaps."

The particulars were that the man had been captured while trying to escape through Jersey in the machine.

I couldn't realize it all at first. Then I suddenly understood that I was just five hundred dollars ahead by the result of the transaction and the day's experience.

In a moment I had figured it out. Some restitution was due the man who had been blackmailed.

Rushing to the phone, I called up the police station:

"Send that machine of mine out to the man in Westchester that was blackmailed," I requested. "That'll just about square up accounts."

Then I made hurried preparations and caught the boat I had planned to take. It took some hustling; but I had five hundred dollars in my pocket, and I sailed to get that big order with the most satisfied feeling: I have had for some time.

MUSIC.

THERE'S music in the sighing of a reed;
There's music in the gushing of a rill;
There's music in all things, if men had ears:
Their earth is but the echo of the spheres.

Lord Byron.

AN ELUSIVE LEGACY*

By HARLAN G. STEELE.

What happened when a photographer closed out his business to drop into a supposed bed of roses, and found a hornet's nest of trouble instead.

CHAPTER XXX.

"FOR BETTER, FOR WORSE."

BATTLE-STAINED and begrimed, haggard from his thirty-six hours' imprisonment in the hollow tree, his lips raw and swollen from the gag, his arms showing where the ropes had chafed in his struggle to escape, glaring wildly, and rabid for revenge, Fenton confronted his chief.

"Guv'nor," he panted, and paused for breath.

In that pause the unseen auditor beneath the blankets tasted the bitterness of death. Another second, and the tale would come, disclosing Dawkins's treachery, Daffodil's innocent ruse, and an array of facts which must inevitably lead to his own discovery.

Another second, and the romance between Daffodil and himself would be over, and the long chase he had led his pursuers done. He would be called on to make a last stand against hopeless and overpowering odds.

He gripped the butt of his revolver tighter in his hand; his muscles grew tense for a spring out into the open.

But the words trembling upon the informer's lips were never spoken. With a hoarse cry of rage, when he saw who it was, Jones sprang forward and struck the man across the mouth, felling him to the ground.

"You dog," he stormed, "what do you mean by annoying me at such a time? Here to beg for mercy, I suppose? Well, I'll give you mercy!"

He punctuated every sentence with a kick.

Stunned and smarting under the rain of blows, scarcely comprehending what he was doing, Fenton struggled to his knees and, after the rough-and-tumble manner of fighting to which he was used,

seized his adversary's thumb between his teeth.

With a cry of pain, Jones tore loose; then, his face livid with demoniacal passion, reached his bleeding hand to his hip-pocket.

Quick as a flash—before either of his breathless watchers knew what he was about—he drew his weapon and fired three quick shots into the other's body.

Fenton drooped, sagged forward, and fell a huddled heap at his feet.

With the three reports, a dozen men surged into the room, Dawkins and the decrepit old clergyman bringing up the rear; but Jones attempted no excuse nor justification for his action, nor showed any sign of compunction. Brutally indifferent as ever, he stood a little away from his victim, calmly binding up his own wounded thumb.

"Here, clear out of here, all of you," he roughly ordered the men, "and take this carrion with you. Dawkins, bring the dominie over here."

There was a moment's hesitation, and he whirled with a scowl toward the lowering circle.

"Do you hear me?" he snapped. "Two of you take this dead cur and bury him. The rest of you get out. And if I hear so much as a word out of any of you, he'll get a dose of Fenton's medicine."

They obeyed then; but it was sullenly and with eyes averted in a way which would have warned a less blindly domineering leader there was mischief in the air.

Jones, however, merely curled his lip in disdain at their mutinous faces.

"Dawkins," he repeated, "bring the dominie over here."

The clergyman was led forward, blinking his dim eyes, tottering upon his shaky legs, a very infirm and feeble old

* Began November, 1908, ARGOSY. Single copies, 10 cents.

man. He seemed not to understand what had just happened, and inquired, in a cracked, quavering voice, if the man carried out had been taken ill.

"Yes," grinned Jones, "he was overcome with joy because he saw his dear master about to become a bridegroom."

"Hey?" queried the old man. "You say that was the bridegroom who was taken ill? Then there will be no wedding? My, my, that is too bad."

"No, no," protested Jones. "A better man than that is to be the husband of this young lady."

"You say you think he'll be better soon? All right, then. I'll wait." And the minister subsided upon the trunk and closed his eyes.

"Here, you fool—get up. I'm the one to be married," roared Jones in exasperation; but the old fellow only nodded his head placidly, murmuring, "I understand; I'll wait," and resumed his meditations.

At last, however, through the efforts of both the bridegroom and Dawkins, he seemed to gain some glimmering of what was wanted, opened his prayer-book, and took his station.

But now Daffodil interposed difficulties. She was seized with a nervous shuddering every time Jones approached her, and vehemently declared that she would not suffer the touch of such a red-handed murderer.

Fearful lest in her hysterical condition she might give something away, Dawkins introduced his interruption sooner than he had intended.

"Hist, guv'nor!" he cried suddenly. "Did you hear that? Three-toes is whistlin' 'Trouble!' out at the front of the mine. You'd better look into it. Mebbe Behave has come to life again."

Jones raised his head to listen.

"I didn't hear anything," he muttered.

"I did, plain as day. Better not wait. Thar might be blazes to pay out thar."

The leader hesitated a moment longer.

"All right," he growled finally. "And maybe this squalling hyena will have quieted down by the time I get back."

Then he started off down the passage.

Watching him until he was safely out of sight around the corner, Dawkins turned with an excited gesture toward the pile of blankets.

"Out with you now, perffessor," he whispered. "His nibs here'll never tumble. Jam it through, an' I'll keep watch fer you up the passageway."

There was not a hitch in the pre-arranged program. Without question, and merely giving a start when Dick tapped his prayer-book as a signal to proceed, the feeble old voice began at "Dearly beloved," and, although breaking badly at times, continued without a skip through to "I now pronounce you man and wife."

Dick caught his trembling, clinging bride into his arms, and sealed the nuptial vows, so strangely taken, with a husband's kiss.

"And now who are you?"

He whirled around with a start at the sound of the strange, quizzical voice at his elbow; then stared with bewildered eyes.

For a wonderful transformation had taken place in the old minister. He was no longer a doddering patriarch with one foot in the grave, but a well-preserved man, straight and sinewy. The eyes, a moment ago so dim and blurred, now searched Dick's face with a scrutiny blue and keen as the point of a needle.

"Are you Behave?" he said, and his voice was as clear and steady as Dick's own.

CHAPTER XXXI.

FOR REVENGE.

DAFFODIL gasped at the question, and instinctively Dick reached for his gun; but the old man was the quicker, and had him covered like a flash.

"Stop!" he said sharply. "I don't think there is any necessity for that between you and me. Unless I am greatly mistaken, we are on the same side of the fence."

"On the same side of the fence?" Dick could hardly grasp such a possibility as that of finding a friend in this place where every man's hand seemed against him.

"Yes; now go ahead and answer my question. Who are you?"

Dick eyed him warily; he might be what he said, and again he might not.

"Why do you have to know that?"

"Why?" impatiently. "Haven't you just been married, and don't I have to know your names in order to fill out the certificate? Hurry up, we haven't all the time in the world at our disposal."

As he spoke, he whipped a blank marriage certificate out of his pocket, and, exchanging his revolver for a fountain pen, stepped toward the table.

"Oh," said Dick, somewhat abashed at the naturalness of the explanation, and, with Daffodil's assistance, started to furnish the necessary details concerning themselves.

"I had hoped you were Behave," commented the man a trifle disappointedly when the names were given him.

"A rose by any other, etc., you know," smiled Dick.

"Oh, I see. But your right ones are Richard Behan and Daffodil Prentice? And she comes from Ravenswood, you say? Whew!"

He stopped to give a low, short whistle, and glanced up quickly from under his overhanging brows.

"I wonder if by any chance you are related to my old college mate, John Behan, of Ravenswood?" he questioned.

"I'm his nephew and heir."

"Heir? Is he dead? I had not heard of that."

"It only happened about two weeks ago, although," a little startled himself to think that the time had been so short, "it seems to me like a century."

But the old man was paying little heed. His face full of concern, he had laid down his pen, and was evidently thinking of long-past boyhood days.

"Poor old John," he muttered, "so he is gone, too."

He roused himself slightly, and turned toward the young people.

"The last time I saw him," he said, "was about six months ago, when he came out here to investigate this property. He stayed in my cabin, and acted upon my advice in refusing to touch the stock. If I had known as much as I do now, I might have warned him against it even more strongly than I did."

"I am glad, though, that he came," he went on after a pause; "for while he was with me, I induced him to do something he had never thought of before. I persuaded him to make his will."

"His will?" exclaimed Daffodil and Dick in one breath.

"Oh, it will make no difference to you young people. That is why I am glad—for your sakes. It will give you undisputed and indisputable title to his property."

"Small good that will do," confessed Dick. "The property is all gone."

"Gone?"

"Yes," and then he told, shamefacedly, how he had been hoodwinked by G. Weatherby.

The minister, however, bade him not lose heart.

"I think, perhaps, the rascal may yet be checkmated," he said. "At any rate, come up to my cabin to-morrow and get the will. Promise me you'll come to-morrow."

"All right," Dick started to agree; then recollecting his position, broke off.

"To-morrow!" he repeated gloomily. "How can I say what I will do to-morrow? As Dawkins says, getting out of this place is not like walking out the door to the front lawn."

"And we are wasting time in talk. Ralph Jones may be back any moment. You seem to be a friend, and I want to ask a great favor from you for two helpless—"

"Exactly," cut in the other with a twinkle in his eye, "you want me to marry your wife over again to Ralph Jones. And a very clever scheme, too. I don't know that I could have worked out a better myself."

"But," stammered Dick, "how did you ever guess?"

"Just as I guessed that you were Behave. Just as I guessed that you had been brought here in yonder trunk unbeknown to the gang. Just as I guessed that Mrs. Behan here had a card up her sleeve the moment I saw her. By putting two and two together; and that is my regular business."

"Your regular business?"

"Yes," with a smile. "I am Charles Morgan, of the Pinkerton Detective Bureau, and I have been a year working up the chain of evidence against this gang which now, with your help, I have so happily completed."

"A detective?" gasped Dick; and Daffodil added, not entirely with satis-

faction: "Then you are only a make-believe minister, and we were never married at all?"

"Oh, no," with a return of that merry twinkle, "never think to slip the yoke as easy as that, dear young lady. You are married all right, tight and fast as though it had been done in a cathedral with flowers, and incense, and choir-boys, and a bishop to officiate.

"You see," he explained more soberly, "I was educated and regularly ordained to the ministry, and I have never relinquished any of the rights or prerogatives of my profession; but I had not been preaching long before I discovered that I was more cut out for catching crooks than for saving souls, and I thus gradually drifted into my present vocation.

"I still am able to do good, though—perhaps more so than if I were regularly in the pulpit; for, as just a plain man, I can get closer to the people around me, to be one of themselves, and thus I have been able to comfort many a sorrowful and sinning—"

But he was cut short by a scamper of feet in the passageway, and Dawkins, his face a blaze of excitement, appeared at the door.

The detective hastily assumed again his well-feigned decrepitude, Daffodil shrank as though from an impending blow, and Dick started on the run for his blankets.

But Dawkins halted the hurried preparations with an impatient stamp of his foot.

"Not that way, perfessor," he called. "Not that way. We're a goin' to head fer daylight this time. The boys has held an indignation meetin' over Fenton's death, an' they've resolved they ain't goin' to stand this tyranny no longer. Headed by Bill Cook, they've started a'ready to 'do' fer Jones an' his pertickler pals out at the front of the mine. Ef we foller 'em, we kin hide in a place I know out near the entrance, an' then whichever side licks, we'll have a chance to git away."

No second bidding was needed. Hardly waiting until he had finished, the three of them—the minister, active and alert once more—were hastening after him into the passage.

Then, guided by his voice, and by the

shuffling footfalls of the mob ahead, they sped through the dark corridors and by hidden pitfalls, until at last they saw through a wide archway the blessed light of day ahead of them.

The avenging band had halted, and were drawing up, ready for a concerted rush; so the little party of fugitives crouched down behind them and waited.

Outside upon the ledge beyond the entrance they could see a little knot of men gathered, and the wind brought in to them the sound of voices raised high in colloquy.

CHAPTER XXXII.

AT THE MOUTH OF THE MINE.

MR. PRENTICE received his daughter's telegram a day late from the hands of a jaded messenger, who had followed up into the mountains where he and a party were unsuccessfully hunting for the train-robbers.

He had taken this task upon himself, partly because he was chagrined at the failure of Ralph Jones to get any clue to the bandits who were so boldly seizing the funds of the company in transit, and partly because Jones himself had urged him to try his hand at it.

The latter, it must be understood, was expecting a young Mr. Behan to arrive, in accordance with a telegram received from his father, and he was therefore desirous of having Prentice out of the way.

For a day and a night the mine president had now been engaged in the quest, and had become pretty well sickened with the lack of results and the unaccustomed hard riding.

Consequently, since his daughter's message was urgent enough, although not particularly explicit, he readily accepted it as an excuse for giving over the expedition, and returned to Red Dog with the messenger, arriving on the morning of the following day.

There he learned of the second hold-up, and realized with disgust that while he had been off up in the mountains the pestiferous gang had neatly sneaked in on him and made the biggest haul of their career.

"I declare, it is positively uncanny,"

he frowned as he stamped up and down the Red Dog platform, "the way those scoundrels always seem to know as if by instinct just when our funds are coming through. I wonder if there could be such a thing as a leak in our office? But, no, that would be impossible. Even Ralph was not aware of this last shipment; only the colonel and myself were—"

He stopped.

"I know it could not possibly have been through me that word got out," he muttered. "Could it be that— Pshaw! I am letting suspicion run away with me."

He took another turn or two up and down the platform, then halted again.

"All the same," he growled, "I am going to have a heart-to-heart talk with that old side-whiskered palaverer just as soon as he gets back. There is more than one thing about this business I don't like, and that I intend to have explained."

The Red Dog station-agent stepped up at that moment, and after a little chat regarding the hold-up remarked by way of gossip:

"I saw the colonel go through yesterday. Will he be at Verdee permanently now, or is this merely one of his flying trips?"

"Ah, is he back?" unconcernedly. "We had not expected him until next week."

But inwardly Prentice, stricken with surprise, was asking: "Now, what the dickens brings him?" and vaguely speculating as to whether there might not be more than coincidence between his associate's appearance and the depredations of the previous night.

In this he was wrong, however; for the telegraph wires and a cunningly arranged cipher code obviated the necessity of any word - of - mouth communications between him and Ralph. The real reason of his advent was that the crop of "suckers" for Verdee was played out, and that he felt it was time to shuffle the cards and cut for a new deal—in other words, to ring the curtain down upon the swindle and set things in motion to see whether or not there was anything in that piece of "peacock" which Dawkins had found.

Meanwhile, the station-agent was prattling along.

"Funny about that man Behave, isn't it? For all that note he left, he never showed up here; but a fellow representing himself to be Behave hit Verdee the next afternoon. Some think he was a tenderfoot who had invested in Verdee and was trying to find out something about it, and some believe he was just a nervy hobo who took advantage of the story to get a square meal. Anyhow, they chased him out of the burg; and if they had caught him, they would have killed him.

"I did hear another story to-day, too, that a mistake had been made; and the chap was the real Behave, after all. Sim Curley told me that a girl who works at your house was authority for it, and that she said he came to your house, and your daughter recognized him; but I guess there isn't anything in that, because—"

But Mr. Prentice's train came along just then, and the station-agent's garrulous flow was cut off.

Yet, although Mr. Prentice did not have time to tell the agent so, he had a very strong suspicion that the final version of the Behave story was the correct one. For one thing, because it explained Daffodil's urgent telegram to himself; and for another, because he thought it much more likely that the populace should needlessly work itself up into a frenzy than that any man, however bold, would attempt an imposture so certain to be detected.

"Poor little girl," he muttered, thinking of his daughter, "new to this country as she is, she must have had a terrible fright. She doesn't know that the bark of Jack Avery and his fellows is so much worse than their bite."

It will be remarked that nothing was said in the station-agent's discourse about Daffodil's disappearance, and this for the very good reason that nobody in Verdee knew anything about it.

Millie, upon arising that morning, had decided, after the fashion of her kind, that she wouldn't "stay a minute longer in a house where there was such goin's-on," and without waiting to get breakfast had promptly "flew the coop"; while, since Daffodil was a stranger, and the village unused to seeing her come

and go, her absence from the street was unnoticed.

The only possible caller was Ralph Jones; and he, it will be understood, was not likely to sound the alarm.

Therefore, Mr. Prentice arrived at Verdee and proceeded home without having his apprehensions excited in the least degree. He was a little surprised not to find Daffodil in, but realized with a smile that of course her scare was all over by this time, and decided that she was probably away on a walk or ride.

A woman would have noticed that the porch had not been swept for two days, and that dust lay thick on the door-sill; but these fine points eluded the grosser masculine perception.

Mr. Prentice determined to make himself comfortable upon the veranda, and rest there from his fatigue while awaiting his daughter's return. He dragged out a steamer-chair, settled it in position, and went to the parlor for sofa-pillows.

But on a table in the darkened room he saw lying a crumpled card, which attracted his attention, and he carried it out to the light to examine it.

"H'm, picture of Daffodil," he commented, "and a pretty good one, too; must have been made by that fellow Behave. But what's this?" glancing at the other half of the card and bending over it with a frown. "This is certainly the smelter, but here are tracks leading off to a ravine. Can there be any mistake about the place? No; this is undoubtedly Ralph Jones on his horse. It must be a recent picture, too, since it is coupled with this train-portrait of Daffodil. Now, I wonder who has had the gall to start any such work without consulting me? By Jove, I am going to find out without delay."

He thereupon called up the office by phone, only to find the clerk and stenographer blankly ignorant, and Ralph and the colonel both at the mine; so, fuming at the incursion upon his authority, and determined to know what it meant, he ordered his horse around and started for the mine himself.

The entrance to the Verdee mine was in a lonely spot about a mile away from the village, and situated on a narrow ledge, a hundred feet or so up the side of a sheer cliff.

There was nobody in sight around the opening as Prentice hove into view; but when he had hurriedly mounted the rickety wood stairway, the colonel came somewhat hastily out upon the ledge, and stood there as though to bar the other's further progress.

He seemed ill at ease and annoyed over his partner's advent, and Prentice suspected from his manner that a conference between the colonel and somebody within the mine had been interrupted by his untimely appearance.

Nevertheless, the old hypocrite tried to be as suave and gracious as ever in his address.

"Ah, Prentice," he said, advancing with outstretched hand, "this is a surprise indeed. I hardly expected you back from chasing the train-robbers until the end of the week, especially since we sustained this new loss last night. That was a sockdolager, and no mistake. Now, what do you think—"

But Prentice had come out to learn just one thing, and he was not to be switched off at present into any discussion of the train-robberies.

"Look here, colonel," he interrupted, "am I the president of this company or am I not? If so, what is the meaning of this?"

He pulled Dick's picture out of his pocket and thrust it belligerently under the colonel's nose.

The other started back in surprise, and, momentarily losing his self-possession, exclaimed wrathfully: "That sneak of a Behave must have done this!"

Then he began to hem and haw and try to explain in his usually oily manner; but Prentice had caught a glimpse behind the curtain.

As with the force of a revelation, he saw that this was no mere transgression of authority he had stumbled upon, but something shady which was being concealed from him. He did not know how he knew it, but he knew.

Then the impulse came to him to press his advantage. He made a monstrous bluff.

"Colonel," he said sharply, "you can't explain to me, and you can't explain about the train-robberies, either. You'd better make a clean breast and be done with it. I am onto you at last."

It was a chance shot, but it hit the bull's-eye square in the center.

"Train-robberies!" hissed the colonel, and fell back a step, his face pasty white.

Then, seeming to lose all control of himself at the thought that he was at last facing exposure, he sprang forward and aimed a savage blow at Prentice's face. In another moment the two men were clinched and pummeling each other for all they were worth.

The colonel, however, was soft and fat; and Prentice, who had kept himself in admirable condition for a man of his years, would have had no difficulty in handling him had not the old chap, finding himself hard pressed, lifted up his voice in a call for help.

In response, there came a hurried step from inside the mine, and Ralph, like a dutiful son, rushed out to the aid of his parent.

This made the odds a little more than Prentice cared to tackle; so, thrusting the colonel back from him, he caught up a heavy piece of iron and sprang quickly back to the extreme corner of the ledge, just beyond the mine entrance, where, with his back against the wall, he could easily stand off both assailants.

The father and son paused at a safe distance and glared at him.

"Ralph," panted the colonel, "this fool knows everything—hold-up jobs and all!"

"What?" Ralph started back in unbelief. Then, when assured once more, his heavy brows met in a black scowl.

"Well, so much the worse for him," he snarled, and reached toward his hip.

But the colonel quickly interposed.

"No shooting," he ordered. "Shaky as we are at present, this must be managed more discreetly. Shooting always causes question and investigation."

"How can we help it?" demanded Ralph impatiently. "Back in that corner he can hold out forever against anything else."

But the father had been considering.

"Ha, I have it!" he cried, with a laugh that was not good to hear.

Then he began to speak in his usual suave accents.

"There is no one in sight, you will observe, Ralph," glancing back along the trail and toward the village. "Why,

then, should not our friend, Mr. Prentice, sustain a deplorable accident? If he should be found at the bottom of the cliff, who could say that he hadn't made a misstep and tumbled off the ledge?"

"Good, I see your idea," assented Ralph. "Wait until I get some help," and he vanished within the door of the mine.

But Prentice, although he paled at the threat, crouched back firmly in his stronghold and brandished his iron defiantly at the colonel.

"Never think to get rid of me so easily as that, you fiend!" he called to him. "I have the advantage here, and I give you fair warning that I will brain the first one of your hirelings that dares approach me. I—"

Then he stopped; for Ralph Jones was back, and with him were half a dozen villainous-looking cutthroats bearing long poles.

"Sandy," their leader directed, "you and Lank and Three-toes take your poles there, and see if you can't stir our friend up yonder. We want him to give us a little jumping exhibition, but for some reason he seems backward about trying it."

Prentice cast a despairing eye down into the abyss below him. A sheer fall it was of one hundred or one hundred and fifty feet, with jagged rocks at the bottom to rend and mangle his lifeless form.

No escape that way; nor, for that matter, up the smooth wall of the cliff above him, or in any other direction; while he knew he might as well look for mercy from a band of hungry tigers as from those evil, grinning faces in front. It was no use to struggle; his time had come.

But at that instant there came a chorus of fierce yells from the entrance to the mine, and through the opening, with leveled revolvers, charged Dick Behan, Dawkins, and the detective, followed by the disorderly mob of avengers.

The hearts of these latter had failed them, it is true, at the last moment, and they had started to turn back; but when the dauntless three suddenly appeared, and had volunteered to lead them, they quickly rallied, and now took the rush with a will.

"Hands up!" came the authoritative words, in a tone that meant no trifling, and Three-toes, Sandy, and the rest made no delay in obeying.

Ralph Jones, however, whirled about at the startling interruption, then gasping, "Good Heavens, it's Behave!" swerved aside from Dick's grasp and hurled himself headlong at the weak line of his own men who had turned against him.

They parted and let him through, and, with a yell of triumph, he dashed on into the mine.

The others, though, proved easy captives, the colonel especially wilting as he saw the long arm of retribution reaching out for him.

One exclamation of surprise he gave, however, as he saw the man his son had called "Behave."

"Why, it's John Behan's nephew," he cried. And then his head dropped on his breast, as he realized the full failure of his plans.

Mr. Prentice, who had heard both ejaculations, pressed curiously forward to the side of the young man.

"Behave and Behan they have called you," he said. "Will you please tell me who you are?"

Dick stepped back just inside the entrance, and, catching Daffodil's hand, led her forward.

"Why, Mr. Prentice," he laughed, "I am your son-in-law!"

CHAPTER XXXIII.

WEATHERBY MEETS HIS MATCH.

It was a week later, and Dick Behan, no longer posing under the playful sobriquet which Daffodil had given him on the train, but in his own rightful name and station, was seated in the office of the Verdee Mining Company in consultation with Mr. Prentice.

The whole of the audacious swindle which the gray-whiskered Colonel Jones and his precious son had engineered was now known, and the prospects for any resumption of operations on the part of the company were about as bad as they well could be.

"There's no earthly hope of doing anything, my boy," said Mr. Prentice

gloomily, by way of summing up the situation. "Even if this theory of Dawkins's, of which you tell me, were to be relied upon, it would take fully one hundred thousand dollars for the necessary development to put the mine on a profitable basis. And where are we to get any such money as that? With its present bad name, no one would touch Verdee if you'd show them the gold ready-coined into double eagles right inside.

"No, my boy, we are ruined, both of us, and we might as well make up our minds to it, and prepare to start life over again."

"Tough, too," ruminated Dick, "when you think that if we all hadn't been in such a tearing hurry to get out of that 'hang-out,' we might just as well have brought away with us the suit-case full of money which Ralph Jones ran back and skipped away with. That's gone for good now, though, I suppose?"

"Oh, dear, yes. We'll never see any of that money again. Morgan is quite positive that Jones must be down in Central America by this time, well beyond the reach of extradition. In fact, so far as I can learn, there is no hope of recovering anything. We are, as I said, ruined."

Dick, however, did not seem utterly cast down by the statement.

"Ah right," he said. "If we are I guess my black box will keep the wolf from the door. Red Dog looks to me like a pretty fair place to set up shop; and, if I am not mistaken, Dawkins will make an invaluable assistant. He has got so handy already with the camera that I let him go by himself into the mine to-day to take those flashlights the district attorney wants to use at the trial of the gang. Oh, yes; ruined or not, we'll get along fine and dandy."

"I wish I were young enough to be so cheerful," groaned the mine president, sinking his head into his hands. "To me the future looks utterly black and hopeless."

"Come, come, father," Dick adjured him, "you mustn't give way like that. I was only kidding about the photograph business; for really I have every confidence that we'll start the mine again, and this time to get out real gold.

I have another string to my bow that I have kept back from telling you about, in order to give you a surprise."

"Another string to your bow. What is that?"

"Weatherby. He arrived in town this morning to defend Colonel Jones, and I am going up to the hotel as soon as Daffodil comes, to have a little *séance* with him."

"Weatherby?" The slight gleam of hope which had come into Mr. Prentice's face died. "You surely don't expect to wrest anything out of him on the slight tissue of surmise and conjecture that you have, do you? Why, even if all you say was absolutely known, I wouldn't doubt but that scaly rascal would find a way to squirm out. Unless I am greatly mistaken, it is he who has so well advised Colonel Jones; and surely he has managed things even better to suit his own purposes."

"All the same," smiled Dick, "I am going to take a whirl at him; and since I see Daffodil coming along now, I guess I'll be off."

Nor did the lawyer, who was lodged at the Palace Hotel, enter any objection when Jack Avery announced who was below seeking an interview.

"Show them up, please," he said, and he greeted them with exactly the same cynical, indifferent manner he had worn when Dick had bearded him in his office at Ravenswood.

"Mr. Weatherby," began Dick, waiving ceremony, "I suppose you can imagine quite well why we are here, so there's no use wasting time by going into explanations.

"Now, I suppose, if I demand back the legacy which you falsely told me was sunk in Verdee stock, you will answer that you never made any such statement, and that there is no hope of recovery of the money, owing to the fact that, acting at my request and under my power-of-attorney, you afterward invested it in Verdee?"

Weatherby eyed him a moment. This was not just the sort of an attack he had expected.

"Without granting any such statements as that I falsely led you astray, or that sort of thing," he finally answered cautiously, "I may say that your idea of

my position is just about as I would myself express it, Mr. Behan."

"Not even though I should tell you that you had conspired with Colonel Jones to have this money of mine, after its investment in Verdee stock, seized by his gang of train-robbers, so that there would be no possible chance of its recovery through you; and that I know this to be a fact?"

Weatherby answered, with his cold smile:

"I am told that you are quite a bright young man, Mr. Behan, but in any such farrago as that you have manifestly over-shot the mark. The supposition is simply a bad bluff on your part, and absurd. However, if you wish to carry it into court, you are at perfect liberty to do so."

He rose as though to terminate the interview, but Dick interposed.

"Hold on, Mr. Weatherby. Before we separate I'd like to have you cast your eye over this little document, and tell me what you think of it. It is a copy of the last will and testament of John Behan!"

"Last will?" He was less self-composed now. "John Behan never made a will."

"Oh, yes, he did. Six months ago, when he was out here, and he left it in the keeping of a trusty friend."

"This might be anything. Where is the original?"

"None of your business, so long as you are assured that it is safe, and will be produced if necessary. But you don't seem to be interested, Mr. Weatherby. Why don't you look it over?"

The lawyer, who had turned a sickly yellow, and whose lips were quivering visibly, made an effort to regain his calm. He seemed to dread glancing through the instrument.

At last, however, he forced himself to it, and by this time had so steeled his nerves that he made no show of agitation beyond an involuntary quaver in his voice.

"Seems to be properly witnessed and authenticated," he commented, and then started to read:

"'In the name of God, amen'—m-m-m—'first direct that all my just debts and funeral expenses shall be paid'

—m-m-m—‘devise and bequeath to Mary Kirkland, housekeeper, five hundred dollars—to Thomas Jarvis, coachman, five hundred dollars.’

“Ah, here we are!

“And I do hereby give, devise, and bequeath to my dear friend, Daffodil Prentice, daughter of George Prentice, the entire residue of my estate, amounting in value to one hundred thousand dollars, more or less.”

Weatherby broke off, and turned to Daffodil.

“You are evidently the residuary legatee, Mrs. Behan,” he said in his carefully constrained tones. “I would congratulate you, if there were anything left, but, unfortunately, your legacy consists merely of a claim for one hundred thousand dollars against the insolvent Verdee Mining Company.”

“I beg your pardon,” demurred Dick, “but it consists of gilt-edged securities, mortgages, stocks, and bonds. At least, you do not deny that such was its condition at the time of Mr. Behan’s death?”

“Certainly; but you forget that you yourself, Mr. Behan, gave me authority to dispose of those securities in any way I saw fit.”

“And what right had you to dispose of Miss Prentice’s property under any authority from me? Oh, come off the perch, Weatherby! You know you are liable for every penny of that money; and, as you are worth it, we are going to have it.”

Weatherby licked his dry lips a moment, considered thoughtfully, then gave up the game.

“The amount shall be paid,” he answered quietly. “And now, as I am somewhat busy, I shall ask you to excuse me, so I must bid you good afternoon.”

“By Jove, he’s a game loser all right!” commented Dick with grudging admiration, as he and Daffodil came downstairs. “He never made a whimper at the last; but, just the same, I’ll bet that ‘The amount shall be paid’ hurt him worse than it would to lose a leg.”

Any further tribute to Weatherby which he might have paid, however, was abruptly broken off by the new interest which greeted him on his arrival at the street.

“Gee!” he exclaimed, “look at all the people running! Wonder what’s the excitement now? What is it, Jack?” waylaying Avery, who just then came tearing by.

“What is it? Why, don’t you know? Thor’s been a terrible explosion at the Verdee mine, and most a hundred men are killed!”

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE PIECE OF “PEACOCK.”

DRAWN by the subtle magnetism which swells a crowd, Dick and Daffodil joined the hurrying throng of men, women, and children streaming out along the trail.

He stoutly scoffed at a catastrophe of such magnitude as that claimed by Avery.

“Why, there were not twenty men employed in the mine altogether,” he said, “and surely all of them cannot have perished. My chief anxiety is for Dawkins. I trust he is not among the victims.”

But although he was proven correct on one point—the reported number of fatalities decreasing almost step by step as they approached the scene of the accident, and at last dwindling down to two—he was wrong on the other; for presently it became pretty well settled that Dawkins was one of the unfortunate pair.

Who the other might be, no one seemed to know, and it was, as yet, impossible to tell, for he had been buried under at least a ton of falling rock, and it would be fully midnight before they were able to reach his crushed and lifeless remains.

How the explosion occurred was likewise a mystery; for it was known there was no blasting in progress at present. But of course, as usual, there were wise-aces on hand to promulgate theories, and equally of course a dozen rumors were rife as to the cause, each more fallacious than the last.

Then, as the crowd lingered and debated and wrangled, word spread that Dawkins was being brought out, and Dick and Daffodil pressed forward—the crowd instinctively making way for them—eager, yet at the same time dread-

ing to learn what verdict the doctors would pass upon him.

He was insensible when they bore him forth, one arm hanging limp and broken at his side, and a bloody bandage about his head; but, while the physicians were examining him, he opened his eyes in recovering consciousness, and the first thing he said, as his glance fell upon Dick with its old, whimsical gleam, was:

"Gosh, perfessor, but that old pictur-gun of your'n does kick!"

"The camera?" exclaimed Dick. "You certainly don't mean that it was responsible for this explosion?"

"Well, it wasn't nothin' else, 'cept'n', of course, it was aided and abetted by a old charge of dannymite that I'd forgot an' left in the rock myself when I was called off from doin' any more blastin' down at the 'hang-out,' fer a reason I once whispered to you about.

"An' a mighty lucky thing it was fer me," he added emphatically, "that them two decided to hitch-up.

"Yer see, perfessor, it was this way—Ouch, doc, that's a arm, not a pick-handle that ye're a twistin' of. It was this way. I took all them snaps at the ravine entrance that you was a wantin', an' then I started fer the 'hang-out.'

"I thought I'd take the outside of the door first, so I set up my traps, an' had my hand on the trigger of the flash, ready to pull her off, when there, by the light of my candle, I seen him a standin' in the doorway."

"Him?" Then a sudden comprehension came to Dick. "You do not mean—"

"Yes; Ralph Jones. I don't wonder that you're surprised. I couldn't believe it myself at first, an' he was right before my eyes. I didn't misdoubt it long, though, fer I seen the gun in his hand a p'intin' right straight at my heart, an' ef thar was ever black murder in one nan's eyes, it was in his'n.

"I give myself up fer lost then; but I wouldn't make no squeal. So, in order ter amuse hisself, an' hold me waitin' until I should lose my nerve, he tells me how he's come back to the mine to get the suit-case which he'd cached there when he skips out, an' what a bully time he's goin' to have on the money while

I'll be food for worms, an' how he's goin' to organize a new gang and send fer all them that stood by him, an' how much better it would have been fer me ef I'd stuck to him.

"An', in order to get him mad an' make him shoot, I taunted him back with how easy you'd played it on him in the 'hang-out,' an' how you'd married Miss Daffodil right under his very nose, an' how she loved you an' hated him.

"That last one caught him. I seen his face go white an' his lips set, an' I says to myself: 'Good-by, everybody.'

"But he missed! The sucker missed at that short range. I heard the ball go whistlin' past my ear, an' whether it was I dodged, or whether it happened by accident, I gave a jerk at the trigger of the old flash.

"Whish! It come like the sun from behind a cloud, makin' everything light, an' showin' the whole place up plainer'n I ever seen it afore. Thar was the passage, an' the door, an' Jones a standin' in the door, aimin' at me for another shot—all for a second.

"An' then—boom! bang!—another more turribler flash, and a roar. I seen the big slab of the 'hang-out' door crash down on Jones, an' then the whole side of the mounting caved in, an' I didn't know no more for a spell.

"But, perfessor"—he signed to Dick to bend closer, and sank his voice to a significant whisper—"I come to a spell while they was gettin' me out, an' I seen that the whole side wall of the 'hang-out' had come away.

"An' it's thar, perfessor," excitedly. "It's all thar, what I told yer about. Tons an'—"

"The man will live," interrupted the doctor, completing his examination of the injuries.

"Live?" roared Dawkins. "Of course I'm goin' ter live! Yer don't s'pose I'm goin' ter leave behind what I've blowed myself into.

"Look, perfessor, I grabbed up a piece that laid beside me, and brung it along ter show yer."

And, opening his hand, he disclosed a fragment of "peacock" ore. Just a dingy bit of rock; but it assured the future of the Verdee mine.

THE HAWKINS NIGHT ERRANT.

By EDGAR FRANKLIN.

The inventor of first aids to every-day dilemmas gets busy
with results that arouse lively activity in his friends.

ANY individual desiring a thoroughly reliable and trustworthy affidavit in support of the old contention that playing-cards are directly of Satanic origin may apply personally to me and receive the same wholly free of charge.

Playing-cards—in the shape of a charity euchre which lured both Mrs. Hawkins and my own better-half from their homes that evening—were responsible for the fact that Hawkins and I were left alone in his library a little before nine o'clock.

The inventor seemed exceptionally well pleased with himself that night, which is saying something. He toyed with his cigar; he eyed me with smiling contemplation; he studied the ceiling and whistled gently. And then, when a lurking suspicion of impending evil began to sprout in my mind:

"Griggs!"

"Well?"

"Did you ever have pneumonia?"

"Never."

"Do you know, then, how most people get pneumonia?"

"By catching cold, in the first place, I suppose?" I suggested apathetically.

"Exactly—in the first place!" exclaimed the inventor. "And just when was the first place?"

"What? I don't know."

As a matter of fact, I had never previously spent more than thirty seconds in the contemplation of pneumonia, and I was not particularly anxious to do so at the moment, for Hawkins had intruded his interesting personality into the middle of a newspaper column on a subject that interested me greatly.

"Then I'll tell you." The inventor leaned forward, rested his elbows on his knees, and permitted his eyes to glitter. "Some few start toward death by way of wet feet and drafts and so on. Ninety per cent of all pneumonia cases date

directly from kicking off the bedclothes in the middle of the night."

"Eh?"

It was a mildly interesting statement; at all events, it had made an effectual end of my reading. And as Hawkins seemed prepared to elaborate on the subject, I laid aside the paper and breathed a gentle sigh.

Hawkins is a good fellow, all things considered; but when he takes the trail of an idea, one might about as well endeavor to stay the flow of words as to try stopping a Kansas cyclone with a paste-board shoe-box.

"From kicking off the bedclothes in the middle of the night," Hawkins went on imperturbably, though dramatically. "Look here! The room's warm when a man goes to bed. He turns down the comfortable and one of the blankets. He sleeps. The steam heat, say, dies down. The wind rises, and the temperature drops. The room simply freezes up. The sleeping man doesn't know it—naturally. Early in the morning he awakens with a chill. He's 'caught cold!' He gets worse—runs inevitably into pneumonia. Then—usually death!"

He sat back and smiled assuredly at me; then, as my lips opened:

"Would a man with, say, a thousand dollars spend that amount to assure his absolute and complete freedom from pneumonia, Griggs?" he inquired earnestly. "*He would.*"

"Would he? Well, he wouldn't if I was the man," I answered. "I'll take my chances and save the thousand."

The inventor's smile disappeared as he sat erect.

"Odd, incredible, as it may seem to you, Griggs, every one isn't constructed on your mental lines. In this small town of New York there are really several people who prefer to pay rather than to die. Indeed, I may say that one or two

men rather higher than you or I in the financial world have even thought such an idea a good possibility for investment."

His teeth bared in a grin of ugly and contemptuous sarcasm. For my part, I picked up the paper—and laid it aside once more. With Hawkins, you listen intently or you raise hard feeling as certainly as the suburbanite's garden raises weeds. Therefore:

"What's the point of it, Hawkins?" I asked genially.

Hawkins studied me keenly for a second. He examined my smile, and appeared to discover it genuine. Slowly his grim air relaxed.

One hand went into an inner coat-pocket and produced a sheet of paper of the regular letter-size. Very carefully he folded it over until only the printing at the top was visible; and, as he extended it silently, I read:

THE HAWKINS PNO-PNEUMONO CO., Inc.

In a way, it was something of a shock; very few of Hawkins's inventions reached the letter-head stage. Probably my eyes opened; certainly the gifted inventor interpreted the expression as one of profound appreciation, for he cried:

"Can you beat that?"

"Not until I know what it is. It looks good, but—what's the answer?"

"The answer," replied the inventor, "is the Pno-Pneumono itself."

"And what in blazes is a Pno-Pneumono, if you get it into captivity?"

"In the first place, it's the dandiest name for a device that's happened in the Christian era! It's novel enough to drag attention from an iron dog! That first unnecessary P lends a touch of novelty that would be worth thousands to an ordinary advertising man. Then, it's descriptive—'No-Pneumonia!'—that's all there is to it, and—"

He broke off and glanced at his watch. For half a minute he pondered; then, as he looked at me, the dear old shimmer of amused contempt for my intelligence came into his eyes, and he said:

"Griggs, I don't really suppose that you'd know a Pno-Pneumono if you met it with a search-light playing on all four sides. But, it's only a minute after nine, and—come with me!"

"Where?"

"Oh, for a little walk."

"We were to wait here until the ladies get back, Hawkins," I suggested.

"And we'll be here before they get back, Griggs. Come!"

There is something masterful, perhaps mildly hypnotic, about Hawkins. He tells you to do a thing and leads the way. Then, your better senses notwithstanding, you follow. After that—

Hawkins had slipped into his hat and overcoat. I arose with a grunt and made my way into the hall, and in another minute we were walking briskly toward the avenue.

"Where the dickens are we going?" I asked.

"You wait!" replied the inventor.

"But—"

"Just—wait!"

One square fell behind another, and still another. We turned a second corner and hurried down toward the brilliant lights of the Hotel St. Annis—than which, perhaps, New York can furnish no more expensive apartment-home to the man with the desire and the dollars.

Just outside the brilliant lobby we paused and Hawkins laid a tolerant hand upon my arm.

"We're going to call on the Vanderfords, Griggs—George and Henry, the bachelor brothers, you know. It happens that they are profoundly interested in the Pno-Pneumono—so much so, that they're going to invest about a million in the company!"

My jaw dropped with a weak squeak. I knew, of course, of the Vanderfords: they were about the wealthiest unencumbered and unattached pair of capitalists in town. But how in the name of common sense had Hawkins located them and interested them in—

"And when we get up to their apartments you'll see the first complete Pno-Pneumono ever constructed," the inventor was saying. "My mechanic will set it up to-morrow—he may have set it up to-day. At all events, I want to make as good an impression as possible. Please try to remember that you're in decent society, Griggs, and cut out any little verbal idiocies that may occur to you. This way!"

He walked in and toward the elevators. I followed humbly. What it might be, was a problem to chill the blood of any one who knows Hawkins; but I was in for it now and the elevator had stopped and we had emerged on the second floor.

Hawkins made straight for the ornate door at the end of the hall, and pressed the button of the buzzer. Half a minute, and the portal was opened by a solemn gentleman in black.

"Both Mr. Vanderfords have retired for the—" he stopped. "Oh, it's Mr. Hawkins! Eh—step in, please, gentlemen!" He permitted himself a smile. "Mr. George has been telephoning to your house this last ten minutes."

We entered—entered one of the biggest and most luxurious drawing-rooms I have ever encountered in a hotel. Hawkins sat down with assurance as the black gentleman disappeared, and smiled at me a sort of "this is the kind of company I keep when away from you" expression.

The valet reappeared.

"This way, please," he said, with the faint suggestion of a grin.

We followed. We went through half a dozen ornate rooms. We landed finally in a big study—and there, clad in bathrobes and pajamas, sat Mr. George and Mr. Henry Vanderford.

George is short and fat and jolly. Henry is well over six feet, lean and sober and solid with muscle. Just now he seemed leaner and soberer than usual, for he said crisply:

"Hawkins, that man of yours came and rigged up your contrivance to-day. It is, I think, complete. But it happens that I wanted to go to an early bed, and you're preventing it. If you'll step in there—"

Hawkins caught his breath for an instant; the genial smile returned then.

"My dear sir," he said, "I don't quite understand; but you shall go to bed at once, if you so desire, and—"

"I guess the machinery stuck," Mr. George Vanderford chuckled. "My brother's bedclothes are nailed down tight and he can't budge 'em or—"

"Did that confounded fool rig the mechanism to the bedclothes!" Hawkins demanded.

He hesitated a moment and started through the heavy curtains to the next

apartment. Henry followed briskly; the other brother and I trailed after more slowly.

"Not only that, Mr. Hawkins, but you assured us that the contrivance occupied practically no space, whereas the affair your men brought seems a trifle larger than a grand piano!" said Mr. Henry pleasantly. "It is also about as ornamental as a kitchen-range, and the racket that comes from its interior is not unsuggestive of a sawmill. I understood that it was something like a typewriter in size and shape, and—"

We were in a big bedroom now. On either side stood a wide bed. At the far end of the apartment was an ordinary steam radiator; but beside the radiator loomed up a thing that could have emanated from no brain save that of Hawkins.

Black, square, range-like in appearance, it must have measured a good five feet in any of the three dimensions. Apparently of iron, switches and cocks ornamented one side; a flexible cord came down from an electric-light socket; a thin metal tube was coupled to the steam-heater from another corner.

If one had had pencil and paper and drawing tools, a college degree in mechanical and electrical engineering, and perhaps ten years of varied shop experience, the affair might have been reduced to simple terms in the course of a week. As it was, it typified Hawkins—and that was all.

Or, rather, it was not all; for, as my eyes wandered farther afield, new wires appeared, to the number of half a dozen. They were strung across the ceiling from the affair by the heater, and they ran to a box at the foot of Mr. Henry's bed—a box as wide as the bed itself, painted black, and with a staggering maze of thin, jointed steel arms protruding from either end.

Where the arms went to, save that they disappeared somewhere under the bedclothes, was a mystery until Hawkins cried angrily:

"That's precisely what he's done. He's connected up everything. I told him not to do that. I told him I'd be here to-morrow to do it myself and—wait!"

He stepped rapidly to the steam-heater. He laid a hand on it, and as-

certained that it was warm, I suppose. He snapped down a switch, and a loud humming came from the seeming range. He laid his hands on valves, and said: "Watch that bed, please!"

We watched. Mr. Henry watched with hands jammed in his bathrobe pockets, Mr. George with a fat chuckle lurking behind his lips, I with open eyes and chill fear in my heart.

Something buzzed; something else whirred; and the shining, jointed arms began to move, slowly and gently.

A pair of them came up, one at either side of the bed. They stretched out. They picked up the heavy white spread and rolled it slowly backward, until it reposed at the foot of the bed. A turn at the steam-cock, and Hawkins thrust his hands in his pockets and remarked:

"The Pno-Pneumono will do the rest. Watch!"

And the Pno-Pneumono did seem to be trying to justify its own existence!

Very gently indeed, another pair of steel arms quivered up from the sides of the box, shook the bedclothes for a second, and rolled back the thick down comforter! A silent lapse of two minutes, while steam sizzled up in the radiator and strange sounds whirled forth from the two sections of the Pno-Pneumono—and still another collection of steel rods rolled up the blanket, tucking it neatly down at the foot!

"It is entirely simple," Hawkins said complacently, as we three stared. "It all works on the idea of the automatic steam-heating system, refined, of course, to a degree. As the temperature of the room rises, a delicate piece of platinum expands, creating different electric contacts within the Pno-Pneumono, all of which can be controlled by these switches on the outside. These start motors in the box over there. The motors, by a cog-transmission device of my own, actuate the steel arms—which connect, as you see, with heavy rods running across the top end of the covers and jointed rods running down the sides. On the other hand, assuming that the steam is going down and the temperature consequently lowering, the process simply reverses itself. Watch!"

He stooped and turned off the steam.

Thirty seconds, and there was a whirr-

ing crash of machinery that might have awakened a chloroformed man. The arms shot out and returned the blankets to their place, retiring politely thereafter and dragging a steel bar with them.

The comforter was returning with a rush. It flattened out, and its actuating arms retired. Another ten seconds, and the spread was back in place with a loud slap, smooth and straight; and as Hawkins stood erect and Mr. George giggled quietly, Henry said:

"It looks like a contrivance of the Spanish Inquisition. Not that I doubt it is great; *but*—will you please call off your engine now, Mr. Hawkins, and turn on the heat and let me go to bed? I'm tired. I figured on retiring early and peacefully. To-morrow we can discuss details, here or at the office. Just now—"

Hawkins threw up switches and turned off cocks. Sparks flew amazingly. Steam sizzled here and there, and subsided. And in the course of a minute the inventor was again smiling in his best diplomatic manner.

"You may now retire in absolute peace, Mr. Vanderford. As you see, I have collected the whole mechanism at the foot of the bed. To-morrow evening I will call and give a full demonstration. For the moment—good night, gentlemen!"

We shook hands swiftly all around; indeed, we seemed to be leaving in rapid-fire fashion, for before I quite realized that the Pno-Pneumono demonstration was over, we stood in the corridor, and Hawkins was saying enthusiastically:

"Now, *that* is the way to handle moneyed people like the Vanderfords, Griggs! That's the proper instinct to follow with big money—and I possess it! Give them all the time they want—don't annoy them when they seem annoyed. Ah!"

He paused on the way to the elevator.

"Say! The little dining-room's on this floor. Let's have a bite, Griggs? I didn't eat much dinner, and the success of this thing has made me hungrier than sin!"

I was not averse to the idea. Hawkins led the way; and in a minute or two we were camped at a little table, and the inventor was intoning:

"Well, we might have a cocktail and a cup of soup and a little lobster-salad—eh? All right— That's right, waiter."

He leaned his elbows on the table when the obsequious gentleman had departed and grinned broadly.

"Not so very, very bad—what?" he said. "Not such a terribly poor device, or such terribly poor people to be dealing with, Griggs? There could be less capital than the Vanderfords have, couldn't there?"

I admitted it. Hawkins, to judge by his eyes, permitted himself a little mental rhapsody. At all events, for five minutes he stared upward and grimaced at the little pink Cupids on the ceiling, the while humming light opera and keeping time with his touching finger-tips. Then:

"Oh, *this* is great, Griggs!" he said. "George said to me yesterday—good old George!—he said that if the Pno-Pneumono panned out properly in a demonstration, they'd be prepared to risk a million or so."

"George looks like a joker to me," I suggested.

"Mr. George Vanderford is a business man," Hawkins remarked coldly. "When a man like George Vanderford makes a tentative promise even, it is as good as his signed note, Griggs. I presume you don't know it, but Mr. George Vanderford—"

And then it happened!

For the doors of the little dining-room went open with a crash, and through them shot the bathrobed, pajamed figure, all wild of hair and eye, of Mr. George Vanderford.

Half an instant he glared about the place, while three or four other late dinner parties all but started to their feet at the sight of the apparition. Then he spotted us and came pell-mell toward us in his felt slippers.

He lost sight, evidently, of a chair in his path. He tripped over it and sprawled beautifully on the floor, a vision of Japanese flowered silk and quilted robe. The head waiter retired suddenly to the pantry for the unaccustomed luxury of a little fit of apoplexy. Several other waiters hoisted Mr. Vanderford to his feet—and turned away abruptly.

It did not seem to affect Mr. Vanderford, though. He caught his breath and

made straight for our table again; and when he got there he caught Hawkins by the arm and shrieked frantically:

"Say, you blithering idiot, I—I—I've been regarding this thing as a joke, you know, but it's got my brother pinned down and he's choking to death in bed, and—"

"*What?*" The inventor shot to his feet.

"Yes! He—he's lying there with one of those hellish bars jammed into his throat, and—" He gulped hard. "You can bet this'll be the last time I try a joke with anything I don't understand thoroughly. I thought I'd have a little fun with him after he was tucked in, and I turned a couple of those cocks and shut down a couple of switches, and the blamed thing—"

Hawkins was gone!

He went like the fabled streak of lightning, and after him went Mr. George, with his bathrobe gathered high for better speed and his bare ankles and beflowered legs twinkling mystically across the dining-room; and, after Mr. George, I made my own hasty progress.

It was a short route. Two dozen paces and leaps, and Mr. George had wrenched open the door with which Hawkins was wrestling. The portal slammed back to the accompaniment, by the black-clad valet:

"Oh, for the Lord's sake, hurry, gentlemen! He's a dyin' in there! He's a stranglin' to death, Mr. Henry is, and—"

Hawkins was on his way again through the ornate rooms, with Mr. George and myself as close seconds. We went through the five or six like three shells. We struck the bedroom curtains and dashed through in a single mass.

And—there lay the long, muscular figure of Mr. Henry, with a one-inch steel bar grinding his neck into the mattress!

He was trying to say things—things which, from the hints of words he managed to choke out, were far better left unsaid. He was gasping in great, blood-curdling wheezes; his brow was flowing with chilled drops; his eyes were popping out.

Also were his legs kicking and his arms waving, violently but invisibly, under the covers. Mr. Henry, palpably, was in trouble.

Yet he was not the sole figure in the amazing little scene. The Pno-Pneumono had its small part to play, and was playing it effectively. The box at the foot of the bed was sending forth a sort of power-house chorus; the combinations of steel rods and joints and elbows and connections were jerking about in restless, peevish fashion.

Somehow, in that first instant, it seemed to me that they were hovering and hesitating and trying to decide just where the next body blow should be landed on Mr. Henry Vanderford, or whether he shouldn't be wiped out altogether with a combined assault or—

Hawkins had dashed forward—and paused with a wild gasp—and suddenly regained calm as he stood by the bedside.

"You will be quite quiet for a moment!" he commanded. "Just for a—"

"You—u r r r r g h!" remarked Mr. Henry. "If—your blasted—uuurrrr!"

"Try not to—not to choke that way," Hawkins advised. "I'll—"

He raced for the main bulk of the Pno-Pneumono.

"You see—of course—that bar on your neck has become firmly fixed, Mr. Henry Vanderford," he said severely. "If the machine had been left alone—"

"Wow!" came from the bed.

We turned quickly. A nice, new steel bar had dislodged itself from the heap of machinery at the foot of the bed and nestled down beside its brother, landing on Mr. Henry's neck with a thud that could have been heard across the street.

"Hawkins, so help me Moses, if I ever get out of this bed alive—" began a choked, stifled, thick tone.

And it stopped right there, for bar number three had unlimbered and settled down beside the other two with all the caressing softness of a pile-driver.

Frankly, it seemed bad to me. It seemed that within about twenty seconds, unless Mr. Henry was able to breathe through his toes, New York was going to lose a great money-power. Hawkins, however, took the matter calmly.

"This thing has been smashed!" he announced to Mr. George. "You've started all the motors at once, and you've disrupted the entire insides. I can't know now how far the damage has gone. Will

you ask your brother to remain silent, please? That—er—noise annoys me and diverts my mind from—"

"But—great Heavens, man! Can't you see he's choking to death?" Mr. George screamed frantically. "I told you I took this thing only as a joke until—"

"Until you found that it wasn't, eh?" Hawkins remarked caustically. "Now—"

"Get—this—off—my—neck!" came wildly from the bed.

Hawkins looked around nervously. His hands twitched; his color rose; I saw that Hawkins himself was growing distinctly flurried. And when that happens to him at a crucial moment—

"Take hold of those bars, and when I say 'Ready!' lift them all together!" he commanded squeakily. "Tell him to duck straight under the covers and then—" He tried half a dozen switches and then screeched: "Ready! Ready! Ready!!"

Mr. George Vanderford and I dived for the head of the bed. Strangely, the bars did really loosen a trifle, for a second or so! We hauled at them—and the head of Mr. Henry went down magically under the covers and disappeared; and an instant later the bars shook off our grip and went down again with a crash that would have fractured his skull had it been beneath!

And what happened then?

Candidly, I don't quite know.

For one thing, the benevolent Pno-Pneumono let off a roar, tore loose its connection with the heater and, in a cloud of escaping steam, danced slowly but gaily over for a chat with its twin-devil, the big box at the foot of the bed! Whirring, roaring, with whatever infernal mechanism Hawkins had stored within it, the Pno-Pneumono crossed the floor in six-inch hops, while the long, flexible cord trailed after it and Mr. George dropped into a chair, moaning weakly.

Nor was the box section of the contrivance lax in responding. From that portion of the affair came the most astounding collection of noises I have ever heard. There were whizzings and whirring, rattlings and squeakings; there were short, emphatic snorts and long, rasping groans.

The insane collection of arms began to stir again as the Pno-Pneumono approached. They wiggled for some ten seconds. A pair of them rose in the air, carrying the spread up bodily in a tight-stretched sheet.

"Now, grab that pair, Griggs!" Hawkins howled. "Grab them and—"

I darted forward again. I darted back even more rapidly, for the arms had descended once more with a slap that jarred the room; another four inches and my neck would have been beneath.

Under the coverings, meanwhile, a human being was passing through an ordeal, if one might judge by the wild, violent poundings on the springs, and the straining mounds of anatomy that popped up here and there and everywhere! Mr. Henry was trying hard to get out, and the arms of the Pno-Pneumono were holding him down as securely as if leather straps had been tightened across the bed.

Then the efforts toward freedom seemed to madden the Pno-Pneumono.

It raised two pairs of arms together and crashed them down. It raised all three pairs, and for an instant we had the merest glimpse of Mr. Henry, struggling on hands and knees and shrieking curses. The whole collection of steel descended, though, before more than a word could come out—and the genuine fun began.

Mr. Henry was penned in by steel-encompassed bedclothes. The steel borders of his couch seemed to have settled down firmly again—but the box at the foot of the bed had not yet opened its little bag of tricks. It did so now with a flourish.

It began by emitting a bellow and splitting wide open. Four motors were revealed, all of them whirring like mad. There were cog-wheels, and eccentrics, and gears, every one of them working overtime.

The arms protruding from the end seemed to grab inspiration from the sight. They lifted themselves all together; they stretched the bedclothes until a last faint shriek came from Mr. Henry.

They pulled hard for perhaps fifteen seconds—and the bed came to pieces with a deafening clatter!

The headboard went down; the footboard went down; the sides shot into the room. Springs, mattress, steel arms, and all the rest landed on the floor in a crazy heap. Arms thrashed frantically; motors whirled on; sparks flew.

The Pno-Pneumono itself, just as a side issue, fell over with a new clatter and also broke apart, scattering wires and valves and switches to the winds.

From somewhere, people seemed to have thronged in. There were, I recall, perhaps half a dozen bell-boys; there were two policemen and the uniformed fireman detailed to the house; there were maids and porters—and they were all bunched together at the bedroom door as Hawkins cried:

"If one of you had had sense enough to turn off the current—"

He dived for the incandescent socket and snapped it: and peace reigned suddenly on earth!

The din ceased. The insane motions ended in an instant. All that remained was a ton or two of broken machinery and the wreck of a handsome bed; and, incidentally, Mr. George, limp and weak in his chair.

But if Mr. George was limp, Mr. Henry was not! Indeed, for utter and absolute lack of limpness, Henry would have taken the first gold medal just then.

The abused spread rose in a heap. For possibly ten seconds it strained—and then shot into view Mr. Henry Vanderbilt, free!

His silk pajamas were pink; his face was purple; his hands were snow-white, because they were clenched hard. His eyes, by the way, were about forty times as luminous and sparkling as anything Hawkins's electrical contrivance had produced that evening.

Perhaps thirty seconds he remained statuesque; then, in a roar like a maddened bull:

"Hawkins!" he thundered.

Hawkins, though, had been facing him during that fateful half-minute. Hawkins, also, is possessed, once in a while, of almost human intelligence. Hawkins can observe things.

Wherefore, I presume, Hawkins really did the wise thing when he suddenly broke the spell by diving headlong through the curtains into the big library. He van-

ished like a dream; but Mr. Henry went after him like a full-fledged nightmare. He took the bedroom with a bound and disappeared as Mr. George and I trailed after dazedly.

He picked up a stool in his flight and hurled it after Hawkins. It missed the inventor, but it did some pretty effective work on the plate-glass front of a big bookcase in the library. Mr. Henry ducked and swerved—and landed erect and running with a mission-chair in his two hands. That, also, followed Hawkins; and another crash of glass followed the chair.

And then Mr. George's hand was on my arm, and we were staring at each other, and he was saying:

"Good Heavens, sir, is that a mad-man, or has my brother gone crazy, or—"

The valet entered just then. He looked at me and he looked at genial Mr. George Vanderford; and, after a cough, he said:

"I—I—think this is the best way out, sir. Mr. Henry is real angry, and—"

He took me gently and led me through the bedroom and through another door to a flight of stairs; and somehow or other, within a minute or so, I was on the chilly, windy street.

Once in a while—about once in every third century—one has to hunt for Hawkins.

Landed on a quiet back street, I began to look for him. I went about the St. Annis carefully. I looked into doors and windows, and finally I went into the lobby and stared about.

Hawkins was absent, and I took a car to the genial inventor's domicile. He

was sitting in the library, breathing hard. There was a neat section of adhesive plaster on his classic forehead. There was another on the side of his neck, in the T-cross style of dressing. Hawkins had been interviewing a drug-store.

"How did you get home?" I asked.

"I got home in a taxicab, and I paid the man five dollars extra to get me away from that lunatic asylum," replied the inventor. "Griggs, do you realize that that infernal, congenital idiot of a Vanderford smashed enough glass—"

"Do you blame him?" I broke in.

Hawkins moistened his lips, not once or twice, but a dozen times. When at last speech became possible he said slowly:

"We'll let the main issue drop, Griggs. About all I want to say to you is that I spent three thousand dollars constructing that thing, and that those two fools, between them, have wrecked it completely. If my wife should turn up before I get out of sight, lie like a gentleman and say that I was tripped up by a banana-peel or collided with a trolley-car—will you? I haven't said a word about the Pno-Pneumono to her—I meant to keep it for—er"—he choked slightly—"a Christmas surprise, and present her with half of the stock. But if she should see me like this—"

He stopped short. Somewhere without a door had slammed. Somewhere inside of half a minute, as Hawkins leaned wearily on the library-table and a sad little trickle of blood oozed down under the plaster, Hawkins's butler pushed aside the curtains and said:

"Yes, ma'am, they are here, ma'am."

And—well, and they were.

WISDOM.

FAR does the man all other men excel,
Who, from his wisdom, thinks in all things well;
Wisely considering, to himself a friend,
All for the present best and for the end.

Nor is the man without his share of praise,
Who well the dictates of the wise obeys;
But he that is not wise himself, nor can
Harken to wisdom, is a useless man.

Walter Hesiod.

A TRY FOR A TREE.

By CHARLES B. FREMONT.

In which that old trio, a British lord, a sturdy young American, and the daughter of Yankee millions form a brand-new triangle.

"AND you really mean it, Maisie? You're determined to throw me down cold? You're not even willing to pay me the compliment of taking a few days to think the matter over?"

Frank Foraker looked sadly and reproachfully at the pretty girl seated in the hammock.

"It wouldn't be any use, Frank. It would have to be 'no,' anyway; so I may as well give you your answer now."

"Well, answer me one question, please. Is there anybody else, Maisie? Have I a rival, and a successful one? Please tell me that."

"I'd rather not say," replied the girl with a blush. "Really, Frank, you haven't any right to ask such a personal question."

"Well, I *have* asked it—and I've got my answer," retorted the tall, sturdy young man fiercely. "Your confused manner confirms my suspicions. There is somebody else; and I guess I know who it is, too. It's that asinine British lord. You're going to marry him for the sake of his title. You couldn't want to marry such a chump for any other reason."

"Stop!" cried the girl, her face crimson with anger. "You are going a little too far, Mr. Foraker. You have no right to talk in that manner. It isn't generous on your part. It isn't even gentlemanly. Lord Dudleigh is my father's guest, and I cannot permit you to abuse him in my presence."

She had jumped to her feet—for it is difficult to be properly indignant and haughty when seated in a hammock—and now stood confronting the young man, her eyes blazing with wrath.

But her display of displeasure did not overawe her companion. He was quite as furious as was she.

"If I had to stand aside and see an American fellow win you, I guess I

could bear it," he declared bitterly. "But it makes my blood boil to think of your throwing yourself away on such a silly, conceited, insignificant lump of British aristocracy. I gave you credit for possessing more common sense, Maisie. I did, indeed."

The girl pointed imperiously to the little white garden-gate.

"I am sorry you must be going so soon, Mr. Foraker," she said with a significance that was unmistakable.

He walked out without saying "Good-by," and banged the garden-gate viciously after him.

Maisie Burroughs resumed her seat in the hammock, and after he had disappeared the expression upon her pretty face softened.

"Poor Frank!" she murmured with a sigh. "What a savage he is when he's really mad. I'm afraid he'd make an awfully bad-tempered husband. It was very boorish of him to bang that gate so violently just now—and of course he had no right to talk that way of Lord Dudleigh. I'm afraid poor Frank is sadly lacking in manners."

She jumped hastily to her feet again as she became aware of a mincing foot-step crunching the gravel path on the other side of the hammock.

"Oh, I say, Miss Burroughs—are you heah?" cried a piping, lisping voice. "I've been looking for you all over the gwounds, you know. Yes, weally. Your dear father sent me to find you. The automobile is all weady, and we're going to take a little wide. Won't you join us? Please do."

"I shall be delighted, Lord Dudleigh," replied Maisie graciously, and allowed their noble guest to escort her through the fragrant gardens to the front porch, where her father's big red touring-car stood in readiness.

Old Burroughs, a portly man, who

had amassed his millions by the manufacture of a famous brand of shaving-soap, was seated in the machine, waiting for them.

"Here she is, Mr. Burroughs," announced Lord Dudleigh as he assisted Maisie into the motor. "I found her at last! I'm half inclined to believe she was twying to hide from me—yes, weally; but I found her, and I've brought her here a captive, you see."

Old Burroughs grunted, and puffed on his big black cigar without further comment.

The inane talk of this little, lisping lord sometimes got on his nerves. The Britisher was not at all the kind of young man he fancied. In fact, if his lordship had been plain *Mr. Dudleigh*, instead of *Lord Dudleigh*, it is probable that old Burroughs would have disliked him very much.

But it was the old familiar story of a self-made American and his wife wishing to see their daughter marry a title. Lord Dudleigh's family was one of the oldest in England, and for that reason Maisie's father had invited him to spend a few weeks on his California estate, and was disposed to accept his somewhat bore-some society with toleration.

"We'll take his lordship for a long spin, and show him some of the beauties of our California country," said Burroughs to Maisie, as they started off.

"I shall be chawmed—yes, weally," murmured the nobleman. "I've heard that your California scenery is very beautiful. Yes, indeed."

"It is God's own country," declared Maisie enthusiastically.

"Do you live heah all the year wound?" inquired his lordship with interest.

"Oh, no! Our home is in New York, of course. We merely spend a few months here each year. Father bought the estate about five years ago, and we are perfectly delighted with it," replied the girl.

"It's a gwand place," assented Lord Dudleigh. "The pwoperty must have cost you an awful lot of money, Mr. Burroughs."

"Oh, no. I got it dirt cheap—only a couple of hundred thousand," replied the old man carelessly.

And at this the British nobleman beamed upon Maisie most affectionately.

After they had been riding at a fast pace for about four hours, old Burroughs suddenly leaned forward and ordered his chauffeur to stop.

"What's the mattah? Anything wong?" inquired the Britisher anxiously.

"Oh, no. I stopped the machine because I want to call your attention to that tree yonder. Take a good look at it. I'll wager that you haven't got anything like it in your own country."

He pointed, as he spoke, toward a colossal redwood which stood in solitary grandeur within a barbed-wire enclosure about a hundred yards from the roadway.

"By Jove! it's jolly big, isn't it?" exclaimed his lordship, adjusting his monocle, and eyeing the magnificent tree with wonder. "It must be a hundred feet high, I should say—yes, weally."

"A hundred feet!" cried Burroughs, with a laugh of derision. "Say *four* hundred feet and you'll be nearer the mark, my boy. Why, it's pretty near a hundred feet in circumference at its base. It must be one of the biggest trees in the world."

"My word! What a monster it is!" exclaimed the Englishman, with growing enthusiasm. "I've never seen anything like it. I'd like to own such a twee. Yes, weally."

"Well, why don't you offer to buy it from the man who does own it?" suggested Burroughs laughingly. "You could take it back with you to England and plant it on your ancestral estates. It would make a big hit over there, I guess."

Of course old Burroughs was only joking; but, greatly to his surprise, the Englishman took the idea with seriousness and enthusiasm.

"By Jove! That's a bully scheme, my dear sir. Yes, indeed. Awfully clevah of you to think of it, you know. It would be jolly fun if I could take that twee back with me. I wonder if the chap who owns it would be willing to sell, at a reasonable figure, you know?"

"You might ask him," retorted old Burroughs, who was beginning to enjoy the joke. "There he is, over there, I guess."

"What! That coarse-looking fellow in the blue smock who is working in the fields yonder?" asked the Britisher in great surprise.

"Yes. He looks as if he's the farmer who owns the place. I guess the tree belongs to him. Let's ask him."

The automobile proceeded a few feet up the road to where a burly, red-faced farmer, with a ragged beard, stood repairing the damage some trespassers had done to one of his fences.

This farmer hated automobiles, and he scowled viciously as he caught sight of the red car.

He scowled still more when the machine came to a full stop and Lord Dudleigh, leaning over the side, beckoned to him and said imperiously: "I say, my man, come heah. I want to talk with you."

The farmer gazed in silent wonder at the little man who spoke so commandingly; then he spat contemptuously upon the grass, grunted, and went on with his work as intently as if he had not heard the summons.

"I say!" cried the Englishman a little louder. "Didn't you heah me? I said, come heah. I want to talk with you, my good fellow."

"Wall, if you want to talk with me, what's the matter with you coming over here to me?" shouted the farmer indignantly.

"What impudence!" gasped the nobleman. "Do you know who I am, my man? I'm Lord Dudleigh, of Dudleigh Manor, England. Come over heah at once."

"I'm Obadiah Skaggs, of Skaggs Farm, California, U.S.A.," was the cool rejoinder. "I'm too busy to bother with you. If you've got anything to say to me, come over here and say it."

Maisie Burroughs laughed merrily at this sally.

"You're up against the real American spirit now, my lord," she said. "Every citizen of the United States is a sovereign, you know. That honest old farmer considers himself the equal of any British peer. If you want to talk with him, I'm afraid you'll have to yield and go over to him."

Now, Lord Dudleigh was quite enthusiastic over old Burroughs's facetious

suggestion that he purchase the mammoth cedar and take it back to England with him, and, being very eager to enter into negotiations with the owner of the tree, he actually humbled himself by stepping from the automobile and crossing the field to where the burly farmer stood.

Mr. Burroughs and his daughter also alighted from the car and followed in the wake of their guest, the old man shaking with suppressed laughter, and the girl making no attempt to conceal her merriment.

"I say, my man," exclaimed his lordship as he confronted Farmer Skaggs, "I consider you a most unmannerly fellow—yes, weally. Is it possible that you are the owner of that big twee yonder?"

"I'm the owner of this farm and everything on it. I never heard of any 'twee'; but if you mean *tree*—yes, I own it. What about it?" demanded the farmer aggressively.

"It's weally a magnificent twee. I'd like to buy it from you."

"Would you? Well, you can't do it. It isn't for sale."

"I'd like to upwoot it and take it back with me to England, you know. I'd pay you a good price for it, my man."

"If you were to offer me a million dollars you couldn't have it," was the gruff reply. "I've had hundreds of good offers for that redwood, but it ain't for sale. If I *was* selling it, though, I'd take good care to see that an American got it, and not a pesky British dude."

"I hate the English. My forefathers helped George Washington thrash yours. I'd sooner see that tree burned to the ground than growing on British soil. Now, get into your pesky automobile and toot-toot away from here. I ain't got no more time to waste on you."

"Weally," gasped the nobleman, after the trio had returned to the automobile and resumed their journey, "the impudence of that wude fellow quite took my bweath away. Just imagine him refusing to sell me that twee at any price! Most remarkable, upon my word."

"I knew he wouldn't sell," laughed old Burroughs. "Let me confess that I was merely having a little joke at your lordship's expense when I made that suggestion. I'll wager that that honest farmer would sooner part with his right hand

than with that magnificent redwood. He no doubt looks upon the tree with as much real affection as if it were a member of his family."

"Well, I've always understood that there's nothing you Americans won't do for money—yes, weally. I've heard that every American has his price. I thought for sure that if I offered a big enough sum that fellow would be glad to sell his twee, you know."

Maisie's face flushed scarlet, and her father looked as if he would like to choke his guest for this insult to their countrymen; but young Dudleigh smiled inanely, apparently quite unaware of the fact that his words had given offense.

After that the conversation drifted to other topics. His lordship, who, despite his lisp and his limited conversational powers, was really not quite such a fool as he appeared, managed to glean from Mr. Burroughs a graphic idea of what that gentleman was worth.

This information was so satisfactory that he made up his mind to lay himself and his title at the feet of Miss Maisie without further hesitancy.

The Dudleigh ancestral estates were mortgaged up to the hilt. The Dudleigh coffers were painfully empty. The noble family was in sad and immediate need of ready cash, and therefore an alliance with an American house worth millions was not to be frowned upon—even though those millions had been made by the manufacture and sale of shaving-soap.

That night he found Maisie alone in the conservatory, and proceeded to "pop the question" to her.

Now, this proposal was by no means a great surprise to the girl. She had confidently expected that sooner or later this blue-blooded Englishman would seek her hand in marriage, and by dint of her parents' persuasion, and her own ambition to acquire a title and literally "lord" it over all her girl friends, she had made up her mind to accept him when the proposal came.

But now something made her hesitate. It may have been because there was a certain air of condescension in the puny nobleman's tone. It may have been because a vision of big Frank Foraker's honest, rugged face rose in her mind.

"I am flattered by your offer, Lord

Dudleigh," she said softly; "but I am afraid that I cannot say yes."

"What!" gasped his lordship, in genuine astonishment. "You don't mean to say that you are going to refuse me, Miss Burroughs? You don't weally mean that, do you?"

Again the girl hesitated. She realized that her ambitious father and mother would be cruelly disappointed if she let slip this opportunity to marry one of the oldest titles in Great Britain's peerage—and she was a most devoted daughter.

She realized, too, that by accepting this little lord's offer she would achieve a great social triumph.

She and her parents had never been able to break into real society. New York's Four Hundred had refused to welcome the shaving-soap man and his family into its select circle.

As Lady Dudleigh, she would be able to turn the tables. She would be a member of the British aristocracy. America's haughty society leaders would humble themselves before her. It was a tempting prospect.

"I don't say that I altogether refuse you, Lord Dudleigh," she said slowly. "I will consent to marry you—on one condition."

"And what is that, my dear Miss Burroughs?" cried his lordship eagerly. "Anything within weason, you know."

"The condition is that you give me an engagement present of a dining-room table, made from a single slice, cut from the base of that redwood-tree you saw to-day."

"Weally, now! What an extraordinary request!" gasped his lordship. "I'll gladly give you a table, of course—but not from that twee. That's quite impossible, Miss Burroughs—Yes, weally. You heard that wude fellow's answer when I twied to buy that twee from him to-day?"

"Yes. And that is why I am making this condition. You must overcome that farmer's objections. You must persuade him to let you have that tree—if you want to win my hand," declared the girl firmly.

"But weally, now, you're so very unweasonable," lisped the Englishman. "If the fellow won't sell his twee, I can't force him to do so, you know."

Please ask me something easier, my dear Miss Burroughs."

The girl shook her head.

"The man I marry must be a man willing and able to overcome great obstacles for my sake," she said. "Your task may be difficult, Lord Duddleigh; but its accomplishment is not impossible. I want a table made from the base of that redwood, as a proof of your devotion. On that condition alone will I consent to marry you."

His lordship's brain was in a whirl. It was the most extraordinary situation in which he had ever found himself. Who had ever heard of an American girl making such a peculiar answer to the proposal of a titled suitor?

He had a vague idea that he ought to consider himself insulted. How dared this girl, the daughter of a common shaving-soap manufacturer, impose such a ridiculous condition upon him—Lord Duddleigh of Duddleigh Manor?

He was half inclined to turn on his heel and leave her presence in high dudgeon. But the thought of her father's millions and his own impecunious state deterred him.

He must win the hand of this girl, and the fortune that would go along with it—even if he had to meet this preposterous condition.

Perhaps, after all, the task would not prove such a difficult one. That rough, blustering farmer might not be so very hard to persuade, on a second attempt—especially if he offered him a big enough price for that confounded tree.

"Very well, Miss Burroughs," he said aloud. "I will do my best to get you that table—yes, weally. It is awfully cwuel of you to set me such a hard pwoblem; but I will twy my very utmost, by Jove! I'd go through fire and water to please you, you know, I'm so awfully smitten with you chawns—yes, weally."

"I wish you success, Lord Duddleigh," replied Maisie. "Get me that table, and I give you my solemn promise that I will wed you."

The next morning the Englishman borrowed his host's touring-car and chauffeur and paid a second visit to Obadiah Skaggs.

"You here again!" grunted the red-faced farmer disdainfully, as the little

nobleman alighted from the machine. "What do you want this time?"

"I want that twee," exclaimed the other boldly.

"Wal, I told you yesterday that you can't have it. It ain't for sale. Can't you get that idee into your thick little skull?"

"But, my dear fellow, I *must* have it!" cried his lordship, determined not to lose his temper, despite the man's insulting words. "It's very important—yes, weally. I don't want to take it to England now, you know. I've changed my mind. I want to have a dining-room table made out of it. The table is for an American young lady. I don't mind telling you, in confidence, that the lady is to be my bwide. You see, now, how very important it is, don't you, my good man?"

"Wal, it may be important to you; but it ain't at all important to me," replied Farmer Skaggs. "If your bride can't eat her meals on any other table than one made from that there redwood, I guess she'll have to eat on the floor."

"Don't say that," pleaded Lord Duddleigh, and then proceeded to play what he considered was his trump-card.

"You needn't mention it to anybody, you know," he whispered, "but the young lady I'm going to marry is very, very wich—one of the wichest girls in America—yes, weally."

"Well, what do I care about that?" growled the farmer impatiently.

"After we're married," went on the other, ignoring the interruption, "I'll send you a check for five thousand dollars in payment for that twee."

"Nothing doing," snorted the farmer indignantly. "I keep telling you that that there redwood ain't for sale."

"I'll make it ten thousand dollars," declared his lordship. "Come, now, my dear fellow; that's a very handsome offer, you know. Nobody else would give you ten thousand dollars for a twee."

"Maybe not; but, as I told you yesterday, I wouldn't sell it to you for a million. It ain't in the market, and that's all there is to it, my friend. If you *must* buy a tree, go and look for one somewhere else. You're only wasting time arguing about this one."

"But I must have this one. No other twee would do," protested the Britisher. "The young lady in question saw this twee yesterday, and was awfully smitten with it—yes, weally. Come, my dear fellow, suppose we make it fifteen thousand dollars. That ought to satisfy you, you know."

Mr. Skaggs gave a low whistle, and a savage-looking bulldog came bounding toward him.

"See that dorg?" remarked the farmer, pointing grimly to the foamy-mouthed brute. "He bites! If you don't get into your pesky automobile, and get away from here quick, I'll tell him to 'sick' you; and he won't lose no time doin' it, neither. I'm tired of tellin' you that that redwood ain't for sale, at any price."

Lord Dudleigh took one glance at the ferocious-looking bulldog, and then fled precipitately toward the touring-car.

When he returned to the Burroughs home he sought out Miss Maisie.

"I say, Miss Burroughs," he said, "won't you please ask me something easier? It's quite impossible to get that twee. That confounded farmer won't sell, you know. I've been to him again to-day and offered him an enormous price for it, and he set his beastly dog on me—yes, weally."

"You must find a way to overcome his objections," declared the girl firmly. "You must get that tree, if you wish to win my consent, Lord Dudleigh. I positively will not marry you unless you accomplish this task."

"You're very cruel, you know," sighed his lordship, looking at her reproachfully. "It isn't fair to ask impossibilities of a chap—weally, it isn't."

Suddenly an idea came to him, and his face brightened. "Maybe I'll get that twee, after all, Miss Burroughs," he declared hopefully. "How much time will you give me?"

"Three months," replied the girl. "You ought to be able to accomplish the task within that period, if you're going to succeed at all."

"Very good, Miss Burroughs; I think you will get your table. I've thought of a way—yes, weally."

To himself he said: "I must go to New York and hunt up my friend, Truxton Troxell. He ought to be able to get

that twee for me. He's the cleverest Yankee I've ever met, and absolutely unscrupulous. He'd do anything for money. I'll make it worth his while to come out here and get that twee, and I've no doubt but what he will succeed."

II.

A WEEK later two men sat in the café of a New York hotel engaged in earnest conversation.

One of the pair was Lord Dudleigh; the other was Truxton Troxell, smooth and debonair, dressed in the height of fashion, and with the manners of "a perfect gentleman," but as clever and consummate a rogue as ever donned a dress-suit.

"And you mean that I am to travel all the way to California in order to negotiate for the purchase of a tree?" Troxell was saying, with an air of disgust. "Really, old chap, you'll pardon me for saying that such a proposition sounds preposterous."

"I know it does, my dear fellow; I know it does," assented Lord Dudleigh. "But it's weally a very important mission—yes, weally. That girl won't marry me, you know, unless I get her a slice of that twee, and she's so deucedly wick that I've simply got to win her."

"You go out there and get that twee, my dear Twoxell, and I'll give you my note for ten thousand dollars—to be made good a day after my wedding-day."

"Make it twenty thousand dollars and I'll go," declared Troxell. "It's a deuced nuisance having to travel clear across the continent on such a fool-errand; and, besides, I guess it's going to be a pretty hard job, if that farmer is as obstinate as you say."

"He's the most obstinate and unweasonable fellow I ever met. All right, my deah boy, we won't haggle over terms, you know. We'll make it twenty thousand dollars."

"In addition to whatever expenses I may incur, of course."

"Oh, yes. That's only fair."

"Very good. I'll start for California to-morrow morning. Don't worry, my dear Dudleigh, you shall have your tree, as sure as my name is Troxell."

While this conversation was going on

in New York City another conversation was in progress on the porch of the California residence of the Burroughs—the speakers being Maisie Burroughs and Frank Foraker.

"I've come back, Maisie," the tall young Californian was saying. "I've fought with my pride for a whole week, and I can't keep away any longer.

"Something seems to tell me that you've changed your mind—that you didn't mean what you said to me the other day. Tell me, girl, isn't there one little bit of hope for me; or are you determined to marry that British lord?"

"I've given Lord Dudley my promise to marry him," replied Maisie softly, and with downcast eyes.

Frank Foraker groaned, and clenched his big fists.

"But it's only a conditional promise," Maisie went on. "His lordship has a task to perform before he can win me."

"May I ask what it is?" inquired Frank eagerly.

"Well, I don't know that it is any of your business, but still I don't mind telling you. There's a farm some miles away from here, and on that farm is a giant redwood. I've promised Lord Dudley to marry him if he presents me with a dining-room table made out of a slice from the base of that tree."

"Gee whiz! That ought to be easy," declared Foraker despairingly.

"Well, I don't know about that," replied Maisie, with a strange smile. "The farmer who owns the tree is not at all anxious to part with it. I'm afraid that his lordship is up against a very hard proposition. Perhaps that's why I made that condition," she added softly.

"What's the name of this farmer?" inquired the young man eagerly.

"I think his name is Skaggs, if I remember rightly."

"Obadiah Skaggs! I know him!" cried Frank excitedly. "And I know the giant redwood you speak of. So *that's* the tree that asinine British lord must get a slice of, in order to win you, eh? So long, Maisie; I guess I'll be off."

"Why, where are you going in such a hurry?" asked the surprised girl.

"I've got an important business engagement," called Frank over his shoulder.

Four hours later, a small automobile runabout drew up outside the Skaggs's farmhouse, and a tall, sturdy young man alighted.

"Hallo, Mr. Skaggs!" he cried, as he climbed the porch and caught sight of the burly farmer sitting in a rocker, complacently pulling on a clay pipe.

"Hallo, Frank!" replied Skaggs heartily. "How be ye? Ain't seen you in a dog's age. Sit down. What's the good word?"

"Don't want to sell that big redwood of yours, I suppose—eh, Mr. Skaggs?" inquired Foraker, getting right down to business.

"No, of course I don't. That tree ain't for sale, Frank. You ought to know that."

"Well, I'm mighty glad to hear you say so," replied the young man fervently. "Had any offers for that tree recently, Mr. Skaggs?"

"Wal, yes," drawled the farmer. "There was a lispin' Englishman around here a week ago. I believe he was a lord, or something of that sort. He offered me fifteen thousand dollars for that redwood. He was dead anxious to buy it, too."

"And you refused to sell?" cried Foraker eagerly.

"Of course I did. He became so persistent that I had to set my dorg on him, in order to drive him away."

"Mr. Skaggs," cried young Foraker hoarsely, "supposing that fellow comes back again and offers you thirty thousand dollars? Would you still refuse to sell that tree?"

"Of course I would. As I told him, it wouldn't make any difference if he offered me a million dollars. That tree ain't for sale. Me and my old woman are too much attached to it, to think of parting with it."

"You're sure you mean that, Mr. Skaggs?"

"Of course I do."

"There's no chance of that con-founded little lord persuading you to let him have that tree?"

"No chance whatever, my son. Even if I was willing to sell, he'd be about the last person I'd make a deal with, anyway."

"Well, I hope that's so," declared

Foraker gravely. "Mr. Skaggs, I'll be candid with you. I don't want that confounded Britisher to get that redwood. That's way I've called on you now. It's a matter of very great importance to me. If I thought that there was the slightest chance of his getting it, I'd brave your anger and the vengeance of the law, set fire to the tree, and burn it to the ground."

"Wal, you needn't do anything like that, Frank," drawled the farmer, taking his pipe from his mouth and looking at the young man intently. "That feller don't stand no chance whatever of getting that tree, so you needn't worry yourself about that."

"Why, my boy, that there redwood is said to be a couple of thousand years old. Do you think for a minute that I could be persuaded to allow it to be cut down? My old woman would never forgive me if I did—and I'd never forgive myself, either. Why, you insult me, Frank, when you suggest such a thing."

"Hooray!" cried young Foraker joyously. "I can't tell you how happy you make me feel, Mr. Skaggs. But I want to warn you to be very careful."

"I guess that Englishman is determined to get that tree. Look out for foul play. He may hire a gang of men to come here in the night, and attempt to cut and carry off that slice of wood while you're sound asleep."

"I know that sounds like a mighty big undertaking, but I believe it could be done. I guess that's what I'd do, if I was in that confounded Britisher's shoes. You want to be on your guard, Mr. Skaggs."

"Don't you worry about that, my boy," replied the old farmer grimly. "I don't think there's any such danger; for if I size him up correctly, that pesky little dude ain't got nerve enough to try anything of that sort."

"Still, I ain't taking any chances. I've thought of the possibilities of that happening, and for the past few weeks I've gone to bed with a couple of Winchester, fully loaded, within reach of my right hand."

"As you know, I'm a pretty good marksman, and I'm a fairly light sleeper. Nobody could cut down that redwood without makin' a powerful lot of noise."

I'd be woke up, and, in return, I'd shoot to kill."

"Besides, there's my bulldog to be reckoned with. I let him loose at nights, and he'd make it pretty hot for any trespassers."

"Don't you worry, my boy; that there tree ain't going to be cut down while me and the missus and the dorg is here to defend it."

III.

For a week after that nothing happened, so far as that giant cedar was concerned.

Then, one afternoon, a smooth, debonair, well-dressed man drove up to the farm in a smart rig and offered to buy the tree, declaring that he was willing to pay twenty thousand dollars for it.

Of course, Farmer Skaggs refused to sell, even at that tempting figure, and after a whole lot of arguing the man got in his rig and drove away, his mission unaccomplished.

"I wonder if that chap is connected with that little pup of a British lord?" mused the farmer, as he watched the rig disappear up the road. "I reckon he's the other feller's friend, or agent, or something."

"This one looks like a mighty clever individual, though—the kind that's up to all sorts of tricks. I guess I'll have to be extra careful about watching that tree, now that he's appeared upon the scene."

That very night Farmer Skaggs was aroused from his slumbers by the loud barking of his bulldog.

The old man jumped hastily out of bed, seized a loaded Winchester in either hand, and advanced eagerly to the window. Before he could pop out his nightcapped head, there came the sharp report of a revolver, followed by a howl, and then an alarming silence on the part of the dog.

Through the darkness the farmer could discern the shadowy form of a man retreating over fences.

He raised one of the Winchesters to his shoulder and fired after the fugitive. After spending all the bullets the rifle contained, he lifted the other Winchester into position and began firing again.

But it was impossible to take any kind

of aim in the darkness. All the shots went wild. The man escaped.

Old Skaggs slipped on some clothes and went out to investigate. As he had apprehended he found his faithful dog lying dead a few feet from the big redwood.

The location of the poor beast's body, a bullet-hole in his head and a fragment of gray cloth between the sharp set teeth explained matters conclusively.

"That infernal scamp couldn't have figured on cutting down that tree, single-handed," mused the farmer, as he stooped regretfully over the body of his dead pet. "He must have come here, simply to look the ground over, I guess—sort of reconnoitering expedition, so to speak.

"The dorg scented him and attacked him, and he shot the poor beast. I wish I could lay hands on the dirty, treacherous villain. I'd get vengeance for the loss of poor Carlo, I'll wager."

All the next day Farmer Skaggs brooded over this incident. At frequent intervals he swore aloud, as his burning indignation at the outrage which had been perpetrated upon him overcame his sense of decorum.

After sundown he stood at the edge of the roadway, leaning against a hitching-post and indulging in a particularly lurid display of verbal pyrotechnics, when a soft, pleasant voice said reprovingly:

"My friend, you should not talk in that manner. Don't you know that it is sinful to use strong language? Control yourself, I beg, and cease those dreadful words."

The angry farmer turned swiftly, and was about to indulge in another string of burning epithets for the exclusive benefit of this interfering passer-by, when he suddenly noticed the cut of the stranger's coat and stopped short, abashed.

"I beg your pardon, sir," he said contritely, "I didn't see you approaching or I wouldn't have said them words aloud, of course. I ain't a very regular churchgoer, I'll admit; but I guess I ain't enough of a backslider to use cuss words, wilfully, in the presence of a minister. I always respects the cloth, and I humbly ask your forgiveness."

"It is granted most readily," replied the other, who wore the conventional

street dress of a clergyman, "I have no doubt that you must have been sorely provoked—otherwise, of course, you would not have used such shocking language. Still, it is our duty to possess our souls in patience, you know—even in the face of great wrongs and bitter provocation."

"Well, it's pretty hard for a man to be patient when he's up against the kind of a scoundrel who shot my dog last night," growled the farmer savagely. "If I could lay hands on the villain I'd beat him to a pulp—yes, I would."

"Hush! hush!" cried the other, raising both hands above his head deprecatingly. "I beseech you to abandon such violent thoughts, my poor, misguided friend.

"Why, I declare you quite shock me! Your savage manner is most terrifying. I was about to appeal to your hospitality and request you to give me food and shelter for the night—for I have traveled far on foot, and I am very weary and half-famished—but now, I must confess that I feel afraid to trust myself under your roof."

The old farmer laughed.

"You need have no fear, sir. I'm perfectly harmless," he said reassuringly. "I'm somewhat put out by something that happened to me last night; but otherwise I'm as quiet and peaceful a chap as you could find in these parts.

"If you care to honor me and the missus by stopping here overnight, I assure you that you will be most welcome. It's a long time since we have had the pleasure of entertaining one of the cloth, and we will do our very best to make you comfortable."

The stranger smiled and held out his hand with an impulsiveness that was almost boyish.

"I cannot resist such an invitation as that, my friend," he said. "I can tell that it comes straight from the heart. I accept your kind offer with gratitude.

"By the way, allow me to introduce myself. My name is Mortimer—the Rev. Josiah Mortimer, of Boston, Massachusetts. My health has been poor, and I am seeking to regain my strength by making a walking tour through your delightful State."

"I'm mighty glad to make your ac-

quaintance, sir. Come on into the house. The missus will be very pleased to meet you, too. We'll do everything in our power to make you comfortable, I assure you. Let me take that bag."

The visitor carried a small brown satchel, and the hospitable farmer relieved him of it. Then he led his guest into the house, introduced him to the delighted Mrs. Skaggs, bade that good woman prepare a hearty meal as quickly as possible, and went up-stairs to get their best room in readiness for the distinguished visitor.

The Rev. Mr. Mortimer proved to be a delightful guest. Mrs. Skaggs was quite charmed by his pleasant manner and breezy conversation, to say nothing of his voluble expressions of gratitude for everything that was done for him.

As for old Farmer Skaggs, his visitor made such a hit with him that when he had been escorted to the chamber which had been prepared for him, he shook hands heartily with the reverend gentleman, expressed a fervent wish that he would "sleep hearty," and once more profusely apologized for his display of bad language on the occasion of their first meeting.

The Rev. Mr. Mortimer laughingly assured his host that that little incident was already forgotten, so far as he was concerned.

"I must say that I deeply appreciate the kindness of yourself and your good wife," he said as he wished his host good night. "I shall never forget the hospitality you have shown me. I shall go back to my church in Boston with the most pleasant and abiding recollections of California hospitality."

It was a long time before Farmer Skaggs was able to go to sleep. The memory of the wrong which had been done him on the previous night kept him awake and caused him to toss restlessly in his bed.

It was long past midnight before he dozed off. Then he had only been asleep for thirty minutes when he was awakened by the sound of wheels on the roadway, the "chug-chug" of an automobile and the tooting of a horn.

"Confound those pesky motor-cars," he growled, rubbing his eyes. "The man that invented them ought to be

hanged, and people who ride in them, too, waking decent, respectable folks in the middle of the night; they should be burned alive."

Having delivered himself of this savage sentiment, he was about to turn over on his side and seek slumber once more when, with a gasp, he realized that the automobile had stopped outside his farm.

He could hear the throbbing of the motor, and the loud voices of the occupants of the car.

Scenting trouble, he jumped out of bed, hastily seized his brace of Winchester, and ran to the window.

As he poked out his head, he saw that the automobile standing in the roadway contained a young man and a girl, in addition to the bespectacled chauffeur.

"Hey, you out there! What the dickens do you want?" shouted the farmer, poking the barrel of one of the rifles out of the window and aiming it menacingly at the occupants of the car.

"We'd like to have a word with you," shouted back the young man in the motor. "Won't you please come down?"

"No. I'm not coming down," growled the farmer. "If you've got anything to say to me—say it from where you are."

"Well, we want to get married," shouted the young man. "Will you please direct us to the nearest minister? We're strangers in these parts, and don't know anybody around here. Hurry up, please. Every minute counts with us. There's no time to be lost."

"Ha!" exclaimed Mrs. Skaggs, who had followed her husband to the window. "Did you hear what he said, Obadiah? They're an eloping couple, I guess. Ain't it romantic?"

"It would be a darned sight more romantic if they did their eloping in the daytime instead of waking folks out of their sleep," snapped the farmer.

"Be on your way!" he shouted fiercely to the party in the automobile. "I ain't going to give you any information. You ought to be ashamed of yourselves for disturbing our rest with such foolishness."

"Oh, Obadiah!" whispered the romantic Mrs. Skaggs in her husband's ear, "don't send the poor dears away like that. You're forgetting that we've got a minister sleeping under our roof this

very night. No doubt the Rev. Mr. Mortimer would be glad to tie the knot for the young people. Let's wake him up and ask him. Don't forget, Obadiah, that we ourselves had to elope in order to get married."

"That's right," replied old Skaggs, "and I was forgetting about the Rev. Mr. Mortimer. I'll go and ask him if he wants to marry this couple."

The Rev. Mr. Mortimer was not at all angry at being aroused from his slumber. When the case was explained to him he cheerfully consented to read the marriage service for the young people.

The young man and the girl were admitted to the house, and the former explained that both he and his sweetheart were of age, but that her parents objected to the match because they wanted the girl to marry an elderly man of their choice, and that therefore they were eloping.

The Rev. Mr. Mortimer declared that this explanation sounded satisfactory to him, and that he was willing to proceed with the ceremony.

The wedding took place in the parlor. The Rev. Mr. Mortimer pronounced the words that made the young couple man and wife, then produced a formal looking document, and bade the bride and bridegroom sign their names to it.

"We must have the names of two witnesses on this marriage certificate," announced the clergyman with a smile. "Perhaps Mr. and Mrs. Skaggs will consent to act in that capacity? Thank you. Sign your name here, please, Mr. Skaggs. And your name underneath your husband's, Mrs. Skaggs."

The farmer signed his name to the document and his wife followed suit.

Then the happy couple expressed their thanks and returned to their waiting automobile.

"They make a fine pair, don't they?" declared Mrs. Skaggs as she stood at the farmhouse door watching the rear light of the automobile until it disappeared from view.

"It always makes me happy to perform a service of that sort," declared the Rev. Mr. Mortimer enthusiastically. "It is the pleasantest part of a clergyman's duties. Good night, my good

friends! I am going to return to bed, and I should advise you both to do the same before you catch cold."

The next morning the Rev. Mr. Mortimer bade his kind host and hostess adieu and left the farm.

IV.

THAT evening Frank Foraker paid Farmer Skaggs another visit.

"How about that redwood? Is it still safe?" inquired the young man eagerly.

"Oh, yes, the tree's all right," replied the farmer. "I guess that pesky Britisher has begun his funny business, though. There was a scoundrel came here night before last and shot my bulldog. Guess his visit had something to do with that tree."

He was explaining the incident in detail, when suddenly he stopped short and uttered an exclamation of surprise.

"Hallo!" he gasped. "Look, who's coming up the road? Wonder what's doing?"

Foraker glanced up and saw something which made him utter an exclamation of apprehension.

A dozen men were advancing toward the farm. Some of them carried long, double-handed saws; others bore axes and coils of rope.

A tall, handsome man marched in the van of the little procession, and with him walked a powerfully built fellow whom even at a distance Farmer Skaggs recognized as the sheriff of the county.

"By jiminy!" gasped the old man. "I wonder what's going to happen?"

He was soon enlightened. The little procession stopped alongside the giant redwood and proceeded to enter the barbed-wire enclosure.

Some of the men peeled off their coats, and, swinging axes, began to attack the big tree with as much coolness as if the latter had been their own property.

The irate farmer rushed into the house and emerged with the two Winchesters.

"Here," he said grimly to his pale-faced companion, "take one of these guns. We'll teach the rascals a lesson."

He and Foraker rushed over to the busy group, their rifles leveled menacingly.

"The first man of you who touches that tree will be shot dead!" cried old Skaggs furiously. "If you think you're going to get away with this outrage, you're making a mistake. Sheriff Hains, I don't understand what you are doing here. Do you mean to say you are going to stand by and let these rogues rob me of my property? I warn you that there's going to be bloodshed if they try it."

"Don't get excited, Skaggs," said the sheriff quietly. "Nobody is going to rob you. This gentleman here claims that this tree is his property. He tells me that you sold it to him the other day, and he asked me to come along in case you should repent of your bargain and try to make trouble."

"I made no bargain," cried the old farmer angrily. "It's all a blanked lie. I recognize this scoundrel now. He came to me the other day and offered me thirty thousand dollars for that redwood. I refused to sell, and he can't say any different."

"Pardon me," said the tall, handsome man softly. "You are forgetting that I came back the next day and persuaded you to sell. I paid you thirty thousand dollars, and you sold me that tree. You can't deny it, for I have your signature and the signature of your wife to this bill of sale. You can't go back on your own signature, you know."

He brandished a formal-looking document. Farmer Skaggs recognized it as the "marriage certificate" he and his wife had signed the preceding night.

Something about the voice and appearance of the tall, handsome man suddenly struck him as being decidedly familiar.

"Ha!" he cried. "I know you now. You're the Rev. Mr. Mortimer—the fake clergyman. I recognize you, even though you've taken off that false mustache and wig. So that wedding service was all a fake, eh? The bridal party was nothing but a scheme to get my signature to that paper, was it?"

"Pooh!" exclaimed the tall, handsome man coolly. "I don't know what you are talking about, my friend. I don't know nothing about any bridal party. You and your wife signed this bill of sale of your own free will. You sold me that tree, and you can't back out of it now."

"Go ahead, men; proceed with your work. Sheriff, I call upon you to protect us against this fellow and his companion. If there is any violence, I shall hold you responsible. We are within our legal rights. This tree is my property. I have Mr. Skaggs's signature here to prove it."

"One minute!" cried old Skaggs. "Let him show us that paper. I defy him to produce our signatures. He's not telling the truth."

"Yes, I am," retorted the tall, handsome man, and he confidently unfolded the document.

Then he uttered an exclamation of astonishment and dismay.

The document was what he had claimed—a bill of sale for the giant redwood—but there were no signatures at the bottom of it.

"I don't understand," he gasped. "The signatures were there a few hours ago."

"Ha!" cried Farmer Skaggs with a triumphant chuckle. "I fooled you, didn't I? I ain't quite as easy as I look. When you came to my house as the Rev. Mr. Mortimer the other night, I thought you really was a minister; but when I happened to peep into your traveling-bag, and saw a bottle of whisky and a pack of cards there, I got kind of suspicious."

"Clergymen don't usually carry such stuff, you know—so I thought it safer to sign that 'marriage certificate' with a pen dipped in some trick ink I bought at a fair last year. That ink is guaranteed to disappear from the paper in twenty-four hours. Seems to work fine, too—can't see a trace of our signatures on that there paper now, can you?"

"Under the circumstances," said the sheriff, "I guess there'll be no tree-chopping while I can prevent it."

That night Lord Dudleigh received the following telegram:

DUDLEIGH. HOTEL MANHATTAN, NEW YORK CITY:

All efforts to obtain tree have failed. Farmer too foxy for me. Returning to New York immediately.

TRUXTON TROXELL.

"How very pwovoking!" exclaimed his lordship, after perusing the message.

"I was so sure Twoxell would succeed. He's such a clevah fellow. I guess I'll have to twy for some other American heiress—some girl who doesn't want a table made out of a big twee."

A week later he proposed to the daughter of a wealthy New York brewer, and was accepted.

When news of the engagement reached California, Frank Foraker paid a visit to Miss Maisie Burroughs.

"Maisie," he said eagerly, "you promised to marry that asinine British lord on condition that he presented you

with a table made from the base of Farmer Skaggs's giant redwood. Why not promise to marry me—on the same conditions?"

"No, Frank," answered the girl softly, "I won't make any such foolish condition."

"Afraid I might succeed in getting that tree?" inquired Foraker with a rueful laugh.

"No, Frank," replied the girl demurely, "I'm afraid you might fail. I don't think anybody could get that tree from Farmer Skaggs."

KIMBER'S GRAND LARCENY.

By FRED V. GREENE, Jr.

The matter of a cheap umbrella that bade fair to prove
a costly item in the expense account of a pleasure-trip.

"WHY, Arthur, whose umbrella is this?"

Mrs. Kimber's voice was full of surprise.

"Ours, of course," her husband replied. "But, I say, please hurry with your dressing. We've just about time for breakfast before the boat docks."

"But don't you remember," Mrs. Kimber insisted. "We only brought one with us, and that was left at the hotel."

Kimber arose from the berth into which he had thrown himself and, with three steps across the small confines of the stateroom, was at his wife's side.

"Why, that's strange!" he exclaimed. "Who can this one belong to?"

As he spoke he picked up the umbrella and examined it critically.

"How did it get here?" Mrs. Kimber queried.

"I suppose the party who occupied this stateroom on the last trip overlooked it," was the reply. "And the person who made up the room never noticed it. It really isn't much of a find," he added, passing it over to his wife. "Worth about ninety-eight cents—all cotton, and the cheapest kind of a handle, even if it is a large, ornate one. There is just one thing in its favor—it is a very large size, and will be most useful in weather like this."

"Whoever left it must surely wish he had it this morning," Mrs. Kimber remarked. "Just see how it rains."

Kimber gazed out of the stateroom window at the passing panorama of scenery upon the one visible shore of the Hudson, while his wife continued with the few remaining touches necessary to complete her toilet.

"Yes, it is coming down some," he drawled, after a thoughtful silence. "Just as if the elements would make up for the two weeks of perfect weather we have been blessed with on our vacation. As to that big umbrella, it will certainly come in very handy this morning."

Mrs. Kimber looked up quickly at her husband.

"Why, Arthur, you surely are not going to take it with you?"

"Of course. Why not?"

"Why? Because it isn't ours. The owner—"

"Will never get it, no matter what we do," Kimber interrupted quickly. "If I turn it over to the purser of the boat he will—well, these lost articles seldom reach their rightful owners. We might as well have it as some one else. Of course, if it were worth anything it would be different."

Mrs. Kimber's surprise at her husband's announcement faded away as she

turned once more to her duties, and presently made way for him. His morning toilet was made in much less time than it took his wife, and soon they were on their way to the dining-saloon, where they partook of a hearty breakfast, at the conclusion of which they hurried to their stateroom again, the boat having already reached its pier.

Kimber hastily gathered up their luggage; and with a bag in each hand, and his wife burdened with the umbrella and a camera, they made their way downstairs and toward the gangplank.

As they neared the man on duty at the gate, busily engaged in taking the tickets of the disembarking passengers, a porter hurried toward the young couple and seized the bags.

"You are rather late, Sam," Kimber muttered.

"Been awful busy, sir," the darky said as he hurried toward the gate.

Kimber relieved his wife of the umbrella and, searching in his pockets for the tickets, followed the porter. When he reached the gate he handed over the transportation vouchers, just as a stranger, who had stood at one side, stepped before the young couple, barring their way.

"I guess they are the ones," the stranger said meaningly.

The purser turned toward this man.

"Recognize them?" he queried briefly.

"Not them, but I do the umbrella," the stranger replied.

Another officer of the vessel, who had been standing near, now stepped toward Mr. and Mrs. Kimber and commanded: "Just a moment before landing. Step over this way."

His authoritative tone and the heavy hand he laid upon Kimber's arm brooked no opposition, so Kimber permitted himself to be led to the far side of the vessel, his wife and the stranger following closely at his heels.

Here Kimber, whose voice seemed to have been completely swallowed up in his surprise, asserted himself.

"What is the meaning of this proceeding?" he demanded.

"That's right," the stranger broke in hastily. "Be awfully surprised." Then he added, addressing the officer: "That's the way they always act."

Without heeding this remark, the officer turned to Kimber. "I wish to know if that is your umbrella, sir?" he asked.

"This one?" the young man queried, holding before him the one he had found in the stateroom.

"Yes. This gentleman claims it is his."

"Perhaps it is," Kimber said sarcastically. "It isn't mine. I wouldn't carry such a cheap one."

"But it seems you are mighty willing to do so," broke in the stranger. "And perhaps you can explain how it came into your possession."

"Yes, I certainly can," was the heated reply. "I found it in my stateroom this morning."

"Just a moment, gentlemen, and let me speak," the officer put in. "This passenger"—nodding toward the stranger—"claims his stateroom was entered last night while he was at dinner, his valise opened, and thirty dollars taken from it, and also that his umbrella is missing. This one, he claims, is the one."

"Well, he can have it," Kimber burst out angrily. "I found it in my stateroom this morning, I say."

"Yes, that is the truth," his wife declared, for the first time venturing her testimony.

"And as to the missing money," Kimber continued, "do I understand that you accuse me of stealing it?"

The officer shrugged his shoulders and looked toward the stranger for reply.

"Of course I do!" responded that person. "Do you think for one moment any one believes to the contrary?"

Shaking his finger at the umbrella, he added: "You admit this isn't yours—I claim it is the one stolen from my room. Isn't that proof enough for any one? It is for me, and I'm going to have you both arrested."

Mrs. Kimber gave a little cry of alarm at this announcement, and clutched her husband's arm hysterically.

"Oh, Arthur, why did you—"

"Oh, so you admit it?" the stranger interrupted. Turning to the officer, he directed: "Call a policeman. I'm going to make an example of these two."

"Oh, please, sir, don't do anything

like that!" Mrs. Kimber wailed tearfully. "Won't you believe us when we say we are innocent? Take your umbrella; but I give you my word of honor we know nothing of who robbed you."

The officer turned to the stranger.

"Now, there may be some mistake, after all. Perhaps—"

"Perhaps nothing!" the stranger interrupted in tones of rage. "As a public conveyance, you people are liable for the safety of your passengers; and had I come back to my room while this man was in there, I might have been shot. Now, you call a policeman, or I'll sue your company; and if I do, I'll win out, you bet! Likely story that—their finding the umbrella in their stateroom."

"Well, whether it's true or not, they should receive the benefit of the doubt," the officer said, somewhat touched with the condition of Mrs. Kimber, who was now bordering upon hysteria.

"Confound it, you're a fool, man!" Kimber exclaimed. "I say it is true, and have my wife here to bear me out in my statements. Further than that, I can easily get witnesses to prove who I am, and what my reputation is."

The stranger, too, seemed slightly touched at the young woman's grief, and his tone softened a trifle as he said, gazing steadily at her: "Well, that may be so, but that doesn't bring back my thirty dollars."

"Oh, Arthur, give him thirty dollars," Mrs. Kimber pleaded. "We are innocent, and that will prove it."

"No, I'm hanged if I will!" her husband burst out. "Instead of proving our innocence, it proves our guilt, and I'll submit to arrest before I'll do that. As for you"—he turned quickly toward his accuser—"if I had you alone in a ten-acre lot, I'd give you a thrashing that you would never forget, for daring to intimate that my wife and I would stoop to such a thing as stealing. I don't believe you ever lost any thirty dollars—"

"Officer, I order you to call a policeman," the stranger interrupted heatedly. "I don't intend to have any thief talk to me like that."

"Call one! I'll defend the charge," Kimber returned with decision.

As the officer beckoned a porter and

despatched him for the police, the stranger turned to Mrs. Kimber.

"Madam, I regret your husband has taken this stand, and thereby forced me to act with determination in this matter. Had he been willing to return the umbrella and the money, I would gladly have let the matter drop."

"But it isn't too late," she cried hopefully. "We are innocent; but if you will not arrest us, we will give what you have lost rather than be disgraced. Arthur, it's the best way out of it. Give the gentleman—"

"Never!" Kimber announced firmly. "Do you think for one instant I'll do that; and by so doing admit our guilt? No, I'd submit to arrest first!"

"Arthur, have you no consideration for me?" his wife pleaded. "Do it for my sake. I could never live through it, if we were arrested and taken to a police-station as common criminals."

"No, I will not—"

"Then I'll do it!" his wife interrupted.

Tearing a diamond ring from her finger, she declared: "This is worth much more than thirty dollars. Take it, but let us go free."

She extended it toward the stranger, but her husband snatched it from her hand.

"You don't know what you are doing," he said.

"What's this?" demanded a rough voice behind them; and the little party turned to face the rubber-coated policeman who had been summoned by the porter.

The sudden appearance of the guardian of the law seemed to take the stranger by surprise, and he stammered: "These—this—"

"This man's stateroom was entered last night, and some money is missing, as well as an umbrella," the officer volunteered. "This couple have the umbrella, which they claim they found in their room this morning, but deny any knowledge of the money."

"And how did the umbrella get in their stateroom?" demanded the stranger. "Answer me that."

"Will you press the charge?" queried the policeman.

"Of course I will, although—"

"No althoughs," interrupted the policeman. "Will you, or won't you?"

"Yes—I will," the other replied, but with a trace of hesitation in his voice.

"Wait here till I summon the patrol-wagon," the policeman ordered, and hurried up the gangplank again.

Mrs. Kimber seized her husband's arm.

"Arthur, have you no consideration for me? Have you no thought for my feelings? I could never live down the disgrace. For my sake, if this gentleman will take it, give him the amount he has lost. Can't you realize it is the best way?"

Kimber shook his head doggedly.

"If you do that, for the lady's sake I will let the matter drop," the stranger said. "But only for the lady's sake, mind you."

The young man glanced from one to the other hesitatingly; and his wife, quick to realize he was wavering in his decision, added: "Arthur, please do as I request."

All eyes were upon him; and for a moment he did not reply. Then, suddenly, he thrust his hand into his pocket and drew out his wallet.

"Yes, I'll give you what you have lost. Here is your umbrella. Perhaps I did wrong in not turning it over to the purser. As to the money or regarding the entering of your stateroom, I still insist that I know nothing about either. But, for my wife's sake, if you'll let the matter drop, I'll give you thirty dollars."

A gleam of victory shone in the stranger's eyes.

"A very wise decision, young man," he said.

Kimber counted out bills to the amount of thirty dollars, and was about to hand them over, when he heard rapid footsteps; and, glancing about quickly, saw two policemen hurrying down the gangplank.

"Here, take it—quick!" Kimber said in an undertone.

The stranger quickly pocketed the bills; then, turning to the policemen, declared: "It's all right now, my good men. I find it was a mistake, after all."

"Oh, it was, eh?" one of them remarked sarcastically. "Why didn't you find that out before you had the patrol-wagon sent for?"

"I—I was mistaken," the stranger faltered, somewhat awed by the presence of his questioner.

The policeman who had arrived with the wagon had stood at one side up to this time, but now stepped forward and inquired: "What is this charge, anyway?"

"This man here"—indicating the stranger—"claims these people entered his stateroom during the night and robbed him of a sum of money. And now he refuses to prosecute them."

"I fear I may be mistaken," the stranger insisted, "and would rather lose the money than run any risk."

There was a strange look in the second policeman's eyes as he queried: "What made you suspect this couple?"

"I fancied—" was the hesitating reply. "In fact, I felt sure at first that they were guilty. Mere intuition, I guess."

"He claimed they had his umbrella," the ship's officer volunteered. "One he had left in his stateroom, and which mysteriously disappeared, presumably at the same time as did his money."

The second policeman advanced a step, and looking the stranger directly in the eyes, said decisively: "So you trusted to your intuition, eh? Well, I'm going to trust to mine, too. I guess that umbrella is yours, all right, and I think I can easily explain how it came to get into these people's stateroom."

The stranger retreated a step or two, and then burst out in confused tones: "I do not understand you. Suffice to say that I apologize humbly to all whom I have caused any trouble, and we will consider the incident closed."

"But I do not!" the policeman exclaimed, laying a heavy hand upon the other's shoulder.

"What do—what do you mean?" the stranger stammered, his face paling suddenly.

"I mean that I recognize you from the description sent out yesterday from headquarters. 'Bill Tompkins, formerly ocean liner gambler, is working a new game on Sound steamers,' and it is identical with this one. Bill, you're caught."

"I protest!" the other exclaimed, jerking himself free from the policeman's grasp.

But his captor was too quick for him. There was a short scuffle, and when it was over the prisoner was securely handcuffed.

"Then you do not think we stole his money?" Kimber queried eagerly.

"Hardly. Don't you see his game? And, by the way, Tompkins, you had better hand back the amount this man gave you not to press the charge."

But the criminal showed no outward evidence of hearing the command and remained silent.

The policeman turned to Kimber: "Did you notice in which pocket he put your money?"

"Yes, I did!" Mrs. Kimber burst out. He put it in his right trousers-pocket."

The policeman plunged his hand into it and drew out the bills the husband had so recently handed over. As he pulled them out, something else came with them, which he held up.

"A skeleton-key, eh? That explains everything," he remarked.

"In what way?" Kimber queried. "I don't think I fully understand what you mean."

"Then I'll tell you. This Tompkins boards a boat bound for New York, and where the run is made overnight. Then he looks over the passengers for a young couple upon whom he thinks he can work his game, watches them go to their stateroom, and then awaits their coming out. Here the skeleton-key is brought into play. He uses it, enters the room, and leaves his umbrella, which you will note is one that can very easily be identified. That ends his work for the present.

"The next morning he complains that

his stateroom has been entered and some money stolen, and then watches for the couple to come down with his umbrella. When they do, he accuses them of the theft of his money and calls a policeman. In nine cases out of ten, rather than submit to arrest, the couple make good the amount he claims was stolen, and that closes the case."

"Well, I declare!" Kimber exclaimed in surprise.

"This Tompkins has worked all the coast lines," the policeman continued, "and is evidently starting upon the river steamers." He then turned to Tompkins, adding: "You played your little game once too often, Bill. Come on, now—you'll occupy the patrol-wagon you summoned."

Kimber and his wife stared in amazement, unable to grasp the sudden shift of events.

As the two policemen, one on each side of the stranger, started toward the gate, the one who had recognized Tompkins stopped and faced Kimber.

"Oh, by the way, I nearly forgot to tell you that the description as sent out from headquarters also said that one of the Sound steamer companies had offered a reward of two hundred and fifty dollars for Tompkins's apprehension. That's a matter you had better look into, for it's due you."

As the captors and prisoner passed up the gangplank, Kimber turned to the purser.

"Well, I'll be hanged! That certainly was a clever game, and but for that policeman I'd have been another victim added to his list. As it is"—he smiled as he faced his wife—"well, perhaps we're in two fifty."

LIFE.

DON'T look for the flaws as you go through life;
And even when you find them
It is wise and kind to be somewhat blind
And look for the virtue behind them.

For the cloudiest night has a hint of light
Somewhere in its shadow hiding;
It is better by far to hunt for a star
Than the spots on the sun abiding.

Anonymous.

THAT COVETED CUSTOMER.

By GEORGE M. A. CAIN.

A clothing-store episode, exploiting the old proverb regarding the position occupied by pride with respect to a tumble.

A TALL figure darkened the door of the clothing establishment of Moore & Moore. Kingsland looked over the shoulder of the rather doubtful, clerical-appearing customer to whom he was showing some bargain suits, and recognized Colonel Withergast.

A sudden desire seized him to get through with the doubtful customer as quickly as possible. The colonel looked questioningly at Radcliffe, the other salesman, who approached with a polite bow.

The doubtful customer asked to see a better grade of goods. The colonel and Radcliffe walked toward the counters in the front where the best things in the house were displayed. Kingsland swore softly to himself.

There was a reason. In the first place, the salesmen in the emporium of Moore & Moore were on a commission basis as to their income. In the second place, Colonel Withergast was one of Kingsland's regular customers, and the best of them. In the third place, Kingsland needed the money—or thought he did, which is just as bad.

In the fourth place—but perhaps I ought not to tell about that. Still, it is nothing against either of the spick and span salesmen that they were both in love with the same pretty stenographer who worked in an office over the store. The funny part of it—that is, funny for one of them each month—was that, while both of them could always be sure of enough money to feed and clothe them, it depended upon what might be called an overplus of sales whether either of them would be able to take a girl around to places such as form the appropriate background for the wooing of a pretty stenographer.

So far, neither one of them had been able to go the pace for two consecutive months. Last month, Kingsland had

been flush enough to take her to three plays and a concert, two little dinners and five lunches.

This month he had been broke, and Radcliffe had been taking her out in a hired automobile, down to the race-track, up to a jolly roof-garden show, and to the opening at Coney Island.

And now—for Kingsland to lose the sale to Colonel Withergast made things look as though his rival would win the two consecutive months of desire, with all the possibilities of winning the girl as well.

If he could only get rid of this stranger, who seemed to be doing a regular woman's shopping act, who looked at everything in stock, who, in the end, would turn away with a promise to think about the last thing he looked at—if he could send this meek-eyed nuisance about some other business, he would walk up and take Colonel Withergast away from Radcliffe as his own private property. But the stranger kept right on.

"No, that is a trifle too loud. Yes, but I think I might have something a little more sprightly than that. Haven't you got something in between? Ah, how much is that? Umm-mm—I don't believe my wife would be quite suited with that, anyhow. Let me see some in the next grade."

It was too exasperating. If it had not been for the rules of the house, Kingsland would have made short work of this meek little man, who would probably turn out some sort of clergyman and want a discount that would take all the salesman's profit if he bought at all.

And, over at the other counter, the colonel's strident voice was expressing pleasure with a suit worth seventy-five dollars! Radcliffe was walking about him in a very ecstasy; patting down a wrinkle here; lifting a shoulder there; hardly saying a word, after the manner

of a first-class salesman in a first-class store, but looking as though he had never seen anything quite so fine as the colonel in that suit.

"Forty-five for this?" asked the clerical-looking customer again.

"Yes, and it is rather a bargain at that," replied Kingsland wearily, but still suave. "These sold for fifty dollars at the beginning of the month."

The man shook his head.

"How much is this?" he said, turning to still another counter. "Phew, sixty dollars! Well, I like to look at that sort of thing, but I don't think I would dare show the bill at home."

He was a perfectly hopeless case. He wandered to yet one more of the counters and began fumbling over the piles of neatly - folded garments. Kingsland waited silently for another question. By and by the man came back to the sixty-dollar frock suit.

But he did not speak. He examined the lining and the buttonholes and the seams and the texture—then sorrowfully shook his head.

"Well," he said at last, "I'm much obliged to you. I'll drop in again, maybe."

It was just as Kingsland had expected all the time. He could have shaken his fist in the meek man's face.

The colonel was back at the desk, arranging to have his purchase charged as usual. He bought about one suit a month, and paid on the first as regularly as clockwork. But he did not always buy a seventy-five-dollar suit.

He took one of that kind a year, and, this year he had taken it from Kingsland's rival. It was too late now for Kingsland to break in on the sale and claim the military gentleman as his own customer.

"Can't get it up this afternoon?" the colonel's voice was demanding impatiently. "Why, I thought I could have it in an hour." The colonel must have some big occasion coming on in a hurry, thought Kingsland. He half hoped that the sale would be called off. But no such luck.

"Oh, it won't bother me much if you *can't* send it. I'll have to take it with me. Darned clumsy package, but I'm going straight home on the car."

Kingsland walked to the door. He could bear it no longer. He looked out on the noisy, hot street. But he did not see the throngs of hustling business men, the clanging cars, the mixture of drays and carriages.

His eyes wore a far-away look that reached clear through all these things—through the high buildings across the way, over the East River, through some more big buildings and busy streets, out over stretches of rapidly developing suburbs—until it saw the gay lights and the joyful crowd at Coney.

Yes, he saw a little past that. He saw a big steamboat, and a little corner of it just aft of the great paddle-wheels. And he saw a certain face, with its pretty features outlined in the dim reflection of the moon's light. And he heard, above the splash of the waves, a sweet voice murmuring gently a reply to the question that had been on his lips for months waiting for just that occasion to burst into eloquence.

He had planned that as the last event of next month; and now, it would never come off.

The colonel walked toward the door. Kingsland strained his facial muscles to work a smile that might bring future sales.

"Good afternoon," said the colonel, seeing that he was recognized.

"Good afternoon, Colonel Withergast," said Kingsland, as brightly as he could.

For the first time, as the reflected light of the opposite windows fell full on the military face, Kingsland noticed that the colonel's left eye was artificial.

"Strange I never saw that before," he thought indifferently; then turned his mind again to the day-dream that would never come true.

"Sorry I had to take your customer," said Radcliffe, without looking the part very hard. "Who was the guy that kept you?"

"I don't know," growled Kingsland unsociably.

"Pretty good buyer, isn't he?" went on the other clerk.

He seemed inclined to be conversational.

"Who?" asked Kingsland, with a bored look.

"Colonel Withergast. He bought a seventy-five-dollar suit, with two vests and an extra pair of trousers—ninety-two-dollar sale."

"Uh-huh," nodded Kingsland, as though the subject were of so little interest that he did not care to hear more of it.

"I guess I see where there will be some fun for me next month," continued his rival. "I was feeling pretty hard up, but this changes the situation a bit."

"I suppose so," Kingsland replied, still keeping up the tone of weary indifference.

"Business has been a little dull lately, hasn't it?" kept up the other clerk.

"Pretty," said Kingsland laconically.

The existence of the stenographer upstairs had never been mentioned between the two rivals for her affections. But Radcliffe was feeling too much elated over the situation not to make the most of it. He therefore broke the seal from the subject.

"I think this will let me in for more than I have been hoping for. Fact is, there's a mighty nice little girl I've been taking out off and on. Never could have enough two months running to keep it up, though. And one month was not long enough to bring things to the question point. Now, I'll get another on top of this one."

He eyed Kingsland quizzically, while trying to mask his own elation. Kingsland tried to keep his face inscrutable, and did not answer.

"After all," Radcliffe resumed, "it's the money that does these tricks. If you've plenty of money to spend on a girl, you can give her a good time and see her often. Then she knows you are a success, and that counts a whole lot."

Kingsland did not attempt to argue the point. He rose and started for the back of the store.

But Radcliffe soon followed.

"Yes," he began again, "I think I ought to make it this time, don't you? With two months, taking her somewhere every Saturday night and Sunday? Eh?"

It was real persecution. Kingsland had stood enough.

"Say, if you don't shut up, I'll knock your head off!" he snarled, and walked toward the front once more.

This time Radcliffe did not follow.

But, before he had traversed more than half the length of the store, two figures appeared at the door almost simultaneously. Kingsland recognized the first as that of his doubtful customer, evidently returned to look over more suits. He recognized the other as Colonel Withergast, evidently returned in more of a hurry than he had gone out.

He nearly bounded over the meek shopper as he came toward Kingsland.

"Say!" he shouted, "did you sell me a bill of goods just now?" There was so much emotion in the tone that Kingsland gladly turned his one-time customer over.

"Mr. Radcliffe," he called, in a well-modulated voice.

"What is it, sir?" he asked politely of the clerical-looking, doubtful customer.

The colonel hastened on to Radcliffe, who came very nervously up the aisle.

"I thought—er—maybe—er—you would show me—er—that last suit—I was looking at—again," stammered the doubtful customer.

Kingsland's eye wandered back to the colonel, who had reached Radcliffe at the cashier's desk by this time.

"Are you the man that sold a bill of goods to—" the colonel began, as the meek customer lifted the sixty-dollar suit from the pile and stammered again:

"Yes—er—I think I'll take it." Kingsland did not hear this. He was listening to the rest of the colonel's somewhat lurid question: "To a glass-eyed scoundrel that looks something like me, and has been buying things all over town in my name? I've been following him all morning, and if I catch the—"

"Beg your pardon," said Kingsland to the man who still held the suit in his hand. "Did you say you'd take it?"

Kingsland caught the answer this time, and brought out his blank order slips in a hurry. The colonel was still roaring.

"Of course, I'm not going to pay for the things this swindler buys," he was saying now to the cashier; and the cashier replied: "Certainly not."

Kingsland knew who would have to pay for them. The salesmen were expected to vouch for their credit customers. He felt really sorry for Radcliffe.

"Your name, please?" he inquired of the stranger.

"Professor James Thomas, Milton Grange, New Jersey," replied his customer. "And would you please show me another suit for rough wear—something about thirty or thirty-five dollars?"

The colonel passed out. Radcliffe's forlorn figure followed to the door.

"I may be able to get your suit, if I catch him," the colonel was saying to the salesman. "But he worked this game on me in Chicago three years ago, and got away with it. I'll see what New York police can do. And, say, if this

absolutely sticks you, I'll lend you the money for a month or two. I can stand it better than you can."

Kingsland was glad it would be no harder for his rival. He could afford to feel merciful. A month or two paying up ninety dollars, less his commission, would keep Radcliffe out of the way for a while anyhow.

"I happened to think you did not know me here, and would not take my check," said the professor; "so I brought the price of the two suits in cash. But don't let the other one bring it to over a hundred dollars."

Some Things He Didn't Know.

By LLOYD THACHER.

The trying ordeal of a certain young man on a week's test, with a good job in the balance.

IT was with a great deal of enthusiasm that Tom Gladon alighted at the little station and entered the Gordon Hotel bus, which bore the statement, "Free rides to and from all trains."

Alonzo C. Gregory, president of the Gordon National Bank, through friendship for Gladon's father, had invited the young man to spend a week at his home, with a view to offering Gladon a position in the bank. Tom was most eager to please the old gentleman and try his hand for the first time in his life at some serious work.

After a very good dinner at the hotel, he sought out the bank, and found that he was expected. The keen interest which the two clerks who occupied the outer office of the institution took in his apparel made Tom a bit uneasy lest he had violated some rule of dress in vogue here, but the information that Mr. Gregory was waiting for him cut short his apprehension.

"Glad to see you, young man," were the banker's first words. "No man ever lived for whom I had a greater respect than your father. I hope you will enjoy your stay with us.

"I am a very frank man," went on Mr. Gregory, after they had exhausted the usual topics of greeting, "and will

tell you plainly that the reason why I invited you to spend a week with us before we came to a decision about your entering the bank is that I am a firm believer in an employer's knowing the personality of those whom he employs. I might like you tremendously, and yet feel that you would not be the kind of person I would want in the bank. I will also say frankly that I do like you already, and feel sure that we shall get on. Now, if you will get your grip at the hotel, we will go to the house, and I will have your trunk sent up later."

Satisfied that the first impression had been satisfactory, Gladon hurried to the Gordon House, paid for his dinner, and was soon back at the bank with his suitcase. The president was ready to leave for the day, and the two walked up a broad street bordered by glorious trees to Mr. Gregory's house.

On the way, an automobile whizzed past them, and the older man turned to Tom quickly.

"That's one of about twenty owned in this little town. Pretty good for a place of this size, isn't it? Let's see, I've forgotten what make it is—did you notice?"

Now, Gladon was anxious to show his prospective employer that he was versatile, but his ignorance of automobiles and

all pertaining thereto had always been a source of amusement to his city friends, hence he was absolutely at a loss to suggest what make the machine might be.

"No, sir," he replied; "I did not have time to get a good look at it."

Then the horrible fear came to him that Mr. Gregory might be a motor enthusiast, and he realized with what contempt he would be looked upon if his ignorance should be discovered.

Arrived at the banker's home, Tom was greatly surprised at the magnificence of the house. It proved to be quite the "show place" of the town.

On the broad piazza, over which the vines climbed in abundant profusion, sat three young girls in their white summer dresses. The prospect of meeting so many at once brought some confusion to Gladon, but, with the courage which he had determined a future great banker must possess, he did not falter as he walked up by Mr. Gregory's side.

"I'll have to present you to my daughters," the banker said to him just before they reached the veranda. "Being a young man, I don't suppose you will be afraid of them."

Tom had presence of mind enough to assure Mr. Gregory that the young women's looks should inspire a far different emotion. And then he felt cheap.

They certainly were attractive girls, and the oldest, home from college for the vacation, at once set the young man at ease with all the poise of a woman of the world.

After a short conversation, somewhat strained on Gladon's part, Gregory took him into the house and showed him the room he was to occupy during his stay. Mrs. Gregory joined the two, and her pleasant, motherly face was a welcome sight to Tom.

"I'm very proud of my daughters," said the banker.

"I should think you would be," enthusiastically replied Tom.

Back to the front porch he was escorted, and Mr. Gregory left him there, surrounded by the three daintily gowned girls.

"Young people are better off by themselves," facetiously remarked the banker as he reentered the house.

It should be explained that Gladon,

tall and good-looking though he was, was distinctly a man's man, but his anxiety to please Mr. Gregory through pleasing his daughters, caused him to exert himself beyond his wont when with women. He succeeded in getting on very well until the subject of a dance was mentioned—and then anxiety filled him.

"I'm so glad you came to-day," remarked the youngest of the girls, "as there is a dance to-night, and the fellows of this town are simply horrible dancers."

"But, perhaps Mr. Gladon is not fond of dancing," interposed Mary, the eldest daughter.

"Oh, yes; crazy about it," quickly and thoughtlessly responded Tom.

Now the fact was that he could not dance a step, and the disdain with which he had always looked upon those society men who gave so much time to this form of foolishness, as he called it, had made him a consistent ridiculer of such "frivolity." His reply then had been made on the spur of the moment, and now he saw that he had placed himself in a very unpleasant position.

As the afternoon wore on Tom became more and more thoughtful, seeking to find a way out of his difficulty, but each plan that suggested itself seemed to be too apparent a subterfuge to be convincing. At last, however, he thought of a bright scheme, suggested by a remark of Mary's.

She had been speaking of the athletic feats of the girls at her college, and modestly admitted that she had won the broad jumping contest.

"It's great sport," replied Tom, feeling that here he was at home. "I'm awfully fond of sports."

By tactful and judicious suggestion he finally persuaded Miss Mary to give him a sample of her skill, promising to see if he could beat her at the game.

Out on the lawn went the four, and, despite her dainty gown, the eldest of the girls surprised Tom by the distance she could cover in her graceful leap. And then Gladon himself tried to see what he could do.

It was on his third attempt that the accident happened. As he struck the ground after an unusually long run, his ankle seemed to turn under him, and he

sat on the grass looking up at the girls with well simulated pain expressed on his face.

"Only sprained," he said, feeling of the injured ankle.

"What a shame!" came from the youngest of the sisters.

They helped him to the house and up the stairs to his room, where they left him and hurried below to order all sorts of remedies for the lessening of his pain. Once the door was closed behind them, Tom breathed a sigh of relief.

"They never suspected," he muttered, "and I won't have to tell them that I can't dance. Before the next occasion arises I'll learn how in some way."

By dinner-time, after numerous calls at his room door to see how he was getting on, Gladon thought that he might hobble down-stairs without risking the miscarriage of his plan to escape the necessity of dancing that evening.

"Oh, yes," said the young man in response to Miss Mary's suggestion that he might not want to go to the dance at all; "oh, yes, I wouldn't miss it for the world if I may just sit by and play chaperon."

And so to the dance they went, the two younger girls accompanied by native youths, while Mary and Tom walked together, far in the rear of the others, owing to the necessity of care on the part of the man that he should not injure the much-improved ankle.

At the breakfast-table the next morning Mr. Gregory showed great interest in the affair.

"So your lame leg wouldn't allow you to dance, Mr. Gladon," he said. "Well, never mind, the girls will give you many other opportunities probably."

And fear was in Tom's heart.

But Mr. Gregory's interest in the young people did not stop with inquiries concerning the dance of the evening before, and he proceeded to suggest a plan for the day which would include Mrs. Gregory as well as his three daughters and Tom.

"I haven't taken a day off in a long time," he said genially, "and I think it would be a great scheme to hitch up the team to the three-seated carriage. We'll all of us pile in and go to the falls, have a picnic lunch and drive back this after-

noon. I know Gladon would be interested in the place."

All were properly enthusiastic, and after Mr. Gregory had telephoned to the bank to say that he would not be there that day, the team was brought around and the whole family started for the picnic grounds.

The drive and the cordiality of those about him brought great pleasure to Tom. He remained as quiet as decency would permit when Mr. Gregory spoke concerning the state of the crops and other subjects familiar to dwellers in the country, fearing to show his lamentable ignorance of such matters.

After a two hours' drive Mr. Gregory halted the horses in the shade of a beautiful grove by the river.

"Now, girls," he said, "jump out and find a nice, smooth spot on the grass where mother can lay out the luncheon, while Gladon and I unhitch the horses."

The female portion of the party did as they were bid, and Gladon alighted with the same anxiety in his heart which had possessed him when the subject of the dance had come up.

He had never harnessed or unharnessed a horse in his life. And this man, his future employer, whom he was so anxious to please, was so evidently a lover of animals!

If the fellow had been a little older or had not been quite so anxious to show his versatility, he would of course have confessed his ignorance of things equine and probably no harm would have been done. But he had started on one course, and his determination to carry it through was his undoing.

Mr. Gregory, with the quick skill of one born and raised in the country, soon had the horses unhitched from the carriage, and Tom, by dint of much running around the rig and pulling at a strap here and there, had seemed to be busy without being put to the necessity of doing anything that might cause trouble when the harness came to be replaced on the animals. But at last the blow fell.

"Just take that collar off the nigh horse, please," said Mr. Gregory, "while I tighten up the cruppers—they need it, and I'm afraid I'll forget it when we go home."

"Which is the nigh horse?" won-

dered Gladon, the perspiration streaming down his anxious face.

Seeing Mr. Gregory busy with the harness of one of the animals, he took a chance on the other, and moved toward its head.

Around the horse's neck he discovered a huge leather contrivance. The animal stood stock-still, his bridle off, nibbling at the grass at his feet.

With admirable courage, Tom took hold of the collar and pulled. It stuck at the horse's eyes, which the young man discovered were set in the widest part of his head. He feared he might put them out, but not discovering any buckle or other means of loosening the thing, he continued to pull, and at last, to his relief, the collar came off and lay at his feet.

Proudly he raised it and carried the thing to the limb of the tree on which Mr. Gregory had hung the rest of the harness.

Tom watched his mentor carefully while the latter put a halter on one of the horses, and with great ingenuity succeeded in securing the other in the same manner. Likewise he tied his horse to a tree, as Mr. Gregory had done, and he was an extremely proud young man as he accompanied the banker to a delightful clearing, where the women were waiting for them.

Confident that his cause for anxiety was over, for a time at least, Tom gave himself up to the pleasure which the peaceful beauty of the woods and the interesting conversation of his companions brought him. More than ever, he longed to please the banker, and to remain in this environment, where every one seemed so natural and cordial.

But the climax to the perfect enjoyment of the day came when Mary led the young man along the river-bank to a point where a good view of the falls might be obtained. No manufacturing plant marred the beauty of the water as it fell on the worn rocks below, and Tom was honestly speechless in his admiration of the spectacle.

"I like to have strangers quiet when they first see the falls," said the girl. "It shows that they really appreciate them."

Tom was about to reply, when all the

beauty of the scene, all the pleasure of the day, disappeared. A horrible fear had taken possession of him. What if Mr. Gregory should ask him to help in the harnessing of the team?

Keeping as cool as he could, with that great dread filling his mind, Tom accompanied the girl back to the others, and calmly heard the suggestion of the banker that they had better start for home.

"Pack up the dishes, girls," he said, "while Gladon and I hitch up. It has been a great day, eh?"

The horses stood sleepily under the trees as Gregory and the young man approached them.

"Just slip the collars on the team, will you?" said Gregory. "I have dropped my watch somewhere, and must go back to find it."

If there was anything about a horse that Gladon did know, it was how to put on a collar. Had he not just removed one? So it was with confidence that he unstrapped the halter from the animal he knew best—an easy matter—and started operations with the collar. Noticing that there was a small, pointed end to the oval-shaped thing, and remembering that that was the end which had been uppermost, Tom put the collar over the animal's nose and tried to slip it on. But again it stuck at the eyes. Try as he would, and shove as hard as his muscular arms permitted, the thing would not go on.

The quiet horse, between shoves by the young man, would look at him with a pained expression, and finally raised its head, with the result that Tom could not reach high enough to accomplish anything.

There seemed to be nothing to do but confess his ignorance to Mr. Gregory, but he did hate to be beaten. And he would not give in yet.

Slipping the halter on the horse's head again, he buckled it tightly, and looked around surreptitiously in the direction from which the banker would come. At last he heard the cracking of twigs, and Mr. Gregory's figure appeared in sight.

Grasping the halter again, Tom began industriously working at the buckle.

"I have found my watch," said the older man. "What's the trouble?"

And then Tom succeeded in unfastening the halter.

"For some reason this buckle stuck, and I have been idiotically trying to unfasten it ever since you left. It's all right now, however."

"They do stick sometimes," commented Gregory, taking down the other collar and approaching the horse which Tom had not been near. And then the young man watched the banker carefully.

What was his amazement to see him reverse the thing, holding the larger part on top, and thus easily slip it over the willing head of the animal. Then Tom, with the greatest coolness, did likewise, and with as satisfactory results. Following the actions of the banker when the collar was once on the horse's neck, he again reversed it, and the thing fell properly into its place.

After that it was an easy matter to keep his eyes on the older man, do as he did, and accomplish the harnessing of his horse with but little trouble.

But he was rather worn with mental strain when the ladies came up and they all took their places in the carriage. The drive home after this worry had passed was delightful, and Tom was quite normally happy when the rig pulled up before Gregory's front door.

Safe in the house, with only dinner and an evening on the piazza before him, Tom felt that no more that day, at least, would his ingenuity be taxed. He had become so well acquainted with the girls that they no longer had any terrors for him, and he eased his conscience for his deception by making the resolution that when he came to know Mr. Gregory better, and was firmly established in his bank, he would confess the whole thing to him, and they would have a good laugh together over it.

Dinner and the anticipated evening passed pleasantly, and Tom retired thoroughly satisfied that the man liked him, and that the women of the household were the best in the world. ●

II.

THE morning came, bright, under a cloudless sky, and Tom wondered what this energetic household would have on for the day to give him entertainment—

for seeking to do this seemed to be their chief anxiety.

He was not long left in doubt. Immediately after breakfast there was much telephoning, and at last the youngest sister announced that she had arranged another picnic for that day. She and her sister Grace were to have their devoted swains row them to the springs, where the natives of the village usually went on such excursions, while Tom had been delegated to convey Mary.

The young man had decided that a day with the oldest sister was worth some uneasiness, but the fate which had almost brought gray hairs to his head already seemed to be still on his track. Why was it that these kind people always hit on some form of amusement of which he knew absolutely nothing?

He had never lived near a river, lake, or any body of water, and knew more about the origin of life than he did about handling a boat. If it had been tennis or golf or baseball in which he had been asked to take part, he would have been most enthusiastic. But of horses, the ballroom, or the water, he knew nothing.

His eagerness to carry out the plan for the day, however, was not all pretense, for there would be hours when the boat would not be in use, and those hours looked very pleasant in anticipation.

And so they all started for the river, carrying lunch-baskets, and thoroughly interested in the prospect of a day's outing. Arrived at the boat-house, Tom took delight in launching the skiff—a matter of sheer strength—long before any of the others, and Mary and he were the first to be ready for the start.

Tom had taken his position in the rower's seat and was clumsily putting the oars in place, when the girl spoke to him hesitatingly.

"I know men like to do the rowing," she said, "and perhaps it's awfully selfish of me, but I am simply crazy about the water and—won't you let me row?"

Tom had heard many satisfactory words in his life, but this chance to escape showing his awkwardness before the crowd of men and girls who accompanied them came as a gift of the gods.

"Certainly, Miss Gregory," was all

he could say, as the girl took her place where he had been sitting, and he settled himself comfortably in the stern of the boat.

The row was not a short one, but Miss Mary insisted on remaining at the oars despite Tom's occasional weak suggestions that he relieve her.

It was the same on the way home, after the party had spent the midday hours at the springs, during which period Tom became more than ever convinced that the oldest daughter of Mr. Gregory was about the most sensible and sweetest girl he had ever known.

Back to the boat-house rowed Mary, and as Gladon pulled the skiff up the landing-stage he was considerably ashamed that he had not insisted on exposing his ignorance and coming to the girl's rescue as best he could.

The party arrived safely at the big house; and Mr. Gregory, as usual, was intensely interested in the happenings of the day. That evening, while Mary and Tom were continuing to discuss the subjects which had interested them during the outing, the banker and his younger daughters were in mysterious session in the old man's study.

"Oh, they often do that," said Mary in reply to Tom's laughing comment on the occurrence.

During the remainder of Gladon's stay in Mr. Gregory's home one or two excursions similar to those of the drive and picnic were planned and carried out, and in one or two instances Tom's ignorance of the pleasures to which the inhabitants of the town were so devoted caused him a great deal of uneasiness; but as Mr. Gregory's manner to him was invariably cordial, the young man concluded that these lapses had escaped the banker's notice, or else had not made any deep impression upon him.

The pleasure he had taken in being with these people, and the real liking which he had formed for Mr. Gregory and his family, made Tom's previously formed desire to remain more sincere than ever. But the banker refrained religiously from discussing the subject of business.

On the evening before the week was up for which he had been invited, Mr. Gregory laid his hand on Tom's shoul-

der as they were leaving the dining-room after dinner.

"Perhaps we had better talk business for a little while to-night, Gladon," he said. "Will you come into my study, where we can be undisturbed?"

Excited far beyond his expectations, the young man followed the banker and seated himself in the large chair toward which Mr. Gregory waved him.

There was a moment's silence, and then the banker began:

"I told you, Gladon, when you first came to see me that I liked to know a man personally before employing him. You may think that I have not noticed some things which you have done, but I have."

The banker's face was serious, and his eyes were bent earnestly on his companion. Tom for the first time was really worried.

"I know," continued the older man, "more about yourself, your character and habits, than you think I do. I know, for instance, that you don't dance. I know that you are absolutely ignorant in the matter of the automobile and of harnessing horses; that you cannot row a boat, and I know that you have tried your best to hide all this ignorance from me."

"It's all true, sir," said Tom, humiliated, "and I apologize for my attempted deception."

"I know these things," continued the banker, "from my own observation and from conversations with my two youngest daughters, in which they, unwittingly, mind you, gave me the necessary data from which I have drawn my own conclusions. They would be most unhappy if they thought that they had deliberately given you away."

A more humiliated young man never breathed than was Tom Gladon at this moment.

"I'm so sorry, sir," he murmured, not daring to look at the stern eyes of the banker.

"And now for the reason of this test," continued Mr. Gregory. "This town is full of young men—clerks, lawyers, and business men—who are thoroughly skilled in the use of horses; who are automobile-mad; who are reputed to be crazy about dancing, and most enthusiastic about

spending their time on the river. They are the bane of the solid citizens of the place—and when I wanted a man in my bank I determined to have *none such*. Your ignorance of these amusements has shown me that you are the man I want—and I admire the nerve with which you covered up that ignorance and the ingenuity with which you cured it. You may come into the bank to-morrow, if you care to.”

Tom was far from being sentimental,

but there were tears in his eyes as he took Mr. Gregory's hand.

Later in the evening Gladon was telling the news to Mary, in the dusk of the summer night.

“I believe you knew I couldn't row that day,” he said.

“But I didn't want them all to notice,” replied the girl.

“Perhaps—perhaps I'll ask you to help—to do something for me again—some day,” added Gladon.

A Third-Floor-Back Dilemma.

By GEORGE C. JENKS.

What happened when the man who played the piano was asked to dance, and the unpleasant experience precipitated by the friend who tried to help him out.

“I CAN lend you a coat, Frank.”
“Claw-hammer?”

“No. Tuxedo.”

“Oh, of course! I'd forgotten. You'll need the swallowtail yourself. Thanks very much for the Tux. How about the rest of the regimentals?”

“Well, let me see. I have a white vest for myself. You can use this black one. Have you a shirt?”

“Haven't one that will do. I'm down and out in the matter of linen, Harry.”

“I have plenty of shirts and collars.”

“Good! I can muster studs and cuff-links. They are those pearl affairs—not worth two cents in a pawn-shop. That's why I still have them.”

“Then you are fixed. You can go to my Aunt Margaret's ball feeling comfortable. Here's the coat. I've only worn it once or twice. I guess that's all you need.”

“Well, no,” rejoined Frank Blake slowly. “I'm afraid it isn't all.”

“What do you mean?”

“Only, that we have not considered the little matter of trousers. You know, a six-footer in a short dinner-coat, expansive shirt-front, and high collar, would appear somewhat incomplete, even at a piano, if his dress ended there. Besides the probability of taking cold.”

The two young men laughed.

“By Jove, Frank! I forgot all about the trousers. Haven't you a pair?”

“None that I can wear. These I have on are the best in my wardrobe, and, as you perceive, they are a light gray.”

“That's awkward. You see, when I ordered these evening clothes, I had the two coats made—one for extremely solemn ceremonies, like the opera, and the other, this dinner-coat, for semi-formal occasions. But there is only one pair of— Sure you haven't any black pants, Frank?”

“Look over my stock of toggery for yourself.”

He opened the door of a closet and brought forth a pair of black cloth trousers, which he held up for inspection.

“You see, Harry, these are impossible.”

“They are all right around the bottoms, and they are not shiny or baggy at the knees.”

“Turn them around.”

“Ah, I see!” exclaimed Leslie. “How did you contrive to get them into this state? Sliding down a cellar-door?”

“No. I wore them at church up in Saratoga for a year, playing the organ. Using the pedals on a large church-organ means a great deal of wriggling about on the hard, wooden bench, and before I realized it I had worn two large holes in the cloth. Then, one day I caught myself on a nail inside the organ, while tinkering at a pipe that had gone flat. That made the wreck of the trousers still

worse. The coat had gone into limbo long before."

"Why didn't you buy a new outfit?"

"Well, I knew I was coming down here, and I intended patronizing a New York tailor for my next organ-playing clothes."

"But you didn't do it?"

"No. In the first place, there was no position as organist open in New York—at least for me. In the second, I haven't obtained employment of any kind, as you know, and my six weeks of idleness have cleaned out the exchequer."

He said this bravely enough, but there was a little catch in his voice which he could not control, and Leslie detected it.

"But, you know, Frank," he said, "my exchequer is all right, and—"

"Shut up, will you?"

"It wouldn't inconvenience me in the least to let you have a twenty, and, therefore—"

"Did you hear me tell you to shut up?" thundered Blake. "You have procured me this engagement to play the piano at Mrs. Van Trompe's dance to-night, and the question before the house is: how am I to piece out this suit of yours."

"Aunt Margaret is a stickler for the proprieties," remarked Leslie, staring thoughtfully out of the window, "and while you may not be exactly a guest—"

"I shall be merely a five-dollar domino-thumper, to help the violinist furnish dance music," interposed Frank.

"Still," continued Leslie, ignoring the interruption, "my aunt will insist on your appearing in evening-dress."

"Confound it. What *am* I to do?" groaned Frank. "I've got to have that five dollars. I can't pay my room rent to-morrow without it."

"I'll bring the coat and other things up to you, anyway," said Leslie, leaving the room.

Blake examined the unlucky black trousers again, but could not see any hope in them.

"If I were only on the piano-stool it would not so much matter," he reflected. "But how am I to get there? I must contrive, somehow. Harry behaved like a trump in getting the engagement for me, and even if I were not so hard up I'd fill it now for his sake. Besides—"

His reflections were leading him into a forbidden region, and, as usual, there was a girl in it.

"Pshaw!" he blurted out, after a pause. "What have I to do with Claire Van Trompe? She has forgotten me, of course. Why, I only met her once—that night at the Cornell 'prom.' It's true I waltzed with her twice. But what of that? She talked to a dozen fellows as much as she did to me. She'll never recognize me to-night. I hope she won't. I shall be only a hired musician, and she wouldn't know whether to speak to me or not."

He tramped up and down his little bedroom and shook his fist at the door. Just then Harry Leslie opened it, the garments he was going to lend his chum in his arms.

"Hallo, Frank! What are you squaring off at? Who's the unfortunate you want to thrash? Not me, I hope."

"I was thinking, Harry. That was all."

"You looked as fierce as a Trojan hero. Ajax defying the Tuxedo!" laughed Leslie, holding up the coat as a shield. "Here are the things."

"Thank you, old man. Now, will you go and dress?"

"But, what about your—your—your difficulty?"

"I'll show you when I come down. Hurry up, or it may be *you* that will be late. I'll be ready."

"Still defiant, eh? You always were a fighter, Frank. I might have known you would get over this dilemma somehow. You don't need my advice."

"Well, you take mine and get down to your room. I don't want to have to wait for you," laughed Frank, as he pushed his friend out and closed the door.

"Ajax! Yes," he muttered. "But I believe I'd rather defy the elements, like that old Greek scrapper, than brave the gaze of a lot of New York girls giggling among themselves at a defeat in my get-up."

II.

IN less than half an hour, when Frank stood in Leslie's room, his costume—Tuxedo, evening vest, immaculate linen, etc.—seemed to be faultless.

"Well done, Ajax!" cried his chum.

"What were we worrying about? You have won the victory without showing a wound. There is not a weak spot in you from top to toe."

"Not from the front, Harry. But—look here!"

Frank Blake swung around, and the revelations under the short coat—which, as he was taller than Leslie by several inches, reached only a little below his waist-line—were appalling.

Harry Leslie whistled.

"If you could only wear your overcoat till you reach the piano-stool," he suggested desperately.

"That is impossible, of course. But, never mind. I'll manage."

"We'll take a taxi to my aunt's," went on Leslie. "I wish you were going as a guest. There will be a lot of nice girls there, and you like dancing, I know. By the way, my Cousin Claire, whom you met at the 'prom,' has asked me about you more than once lately. She says you are a divine waltzer."

"I am glad Miss Van Trompe has any pleasant memories of me. But, of course, she won't recognize me in the pianist of to-night."

Leslie made no answer, and in a few minutes they were bowling away toward the old-fashioned mansion near Washington Square where the Van Trompes had lived for generations.

"Harry," whispered Frank, when they were inside the house, "I wish, when you have spoken to your aunt, you would come with me to the piano. Walk as closely behind me as you can. You understand, don't you?"

"Yes."

"Then I'll stand against this wall till you are ready."

"All right. I'll be with you directly," said Leslie. "There's Claire with, my aunt. Nice looking girl, isn't she?"

Leslie hastened away, while Frank Blake took up a retired position in the hall, where he could gaze upon the face of Claire Van Trompe, satisfied that she could not see him.

"Nice-looking girl, indeed!" was his indignant inward comment. "What a way to refer to her! Why, she is ravishingly beautiful. I wonder whether I shall ever dance with her again. By the gods, I *will*! As soon as I get to work

here in New York, I'll make Harry present me properly; and I'll fight for her till I win her, or—well, I'm going to have her, that's all!"

It was the spirit of Ajax, the warrior, in his bosom; and he clenched his strong white hands—which, with their flexible muscles, enabled him to be such a brilliant pianist—as if eager to plunge into battle at that very instant.

The two spacious drawing-rooms, thrown into one, made a fair-sized ball-room. Frank noted that the piano was at the extreme end, between the windows. Florists had been at work, and palms, ferns, carnations, and roses were artistically banked in each window recess.

There were several full-length mirrors built into the walls, and as Frank marched down the room, with Leslie close behind him—almost in a lock-step—he could not help smiling as he saw what a ridiculous figure they cut.

"We look like a couple of convicts, Harry," he whispered over his shoulder.

"That's all right, Frank. The girls think it's a joke. I'll tell them so when you are seated. It will do no harm. They'll credit—or discredit—me with being a social buffoon perhaps; but I don't mind that, so long as it is in the sacred cause of friendship."

"Great guns! Where's the piano-stool?" exclaimed Frank.

"Keep cool. I see it, on the other side of the room, with a girl sitting on it—Miss Stevens. She's a rather good pianist herself, and probably feels more comfortable on that stool than on a chair. It was the stupidity of some of the servants that took it over there, I suppose. Wait a minute."

"Well, hurry!"

Frank turned his back to the piano and inadvertently sat upon the keys, striking a loud discord. Everybody looked at him, and he said something wicked to himself.

Leslie was laughingly explaining to Miss Stevens about the stool, while Signor Scaretti, the violinist, who was looking over his sheet-music, bowed impressively to Frank. They had never seen each other before.

Leslie brought the stool over to the piano, and Frank slid upon it thankfully.

The evening wore on—quadrille, two-

step, lancers, waltz—and Frank, giving all his attention to the piano, worked conscientiously to earn his five dollars.

Suddenly there came a surprise. It was in a pause between dances, and he was arranging his music for the waltz that was next on the program, when Harry Leslie's voice sounded at his side:

"You have met Miss Van Troupe, Frank; but she thought you might have forgotten her."

Forgotten her! Frank Blake was off the stool and bowing low almost before the words were out.

Forgotten her? But, even in that moment of mingled delight and embarrassment, he did not lose sight of the necessity of bowing with his back to the piano.

"I told Harry I was sure you would not remember ever having seen me," laughed Claire Van Trompe—and, oh, what a musical laugh she had! "So I asked him to introduce me."

Frank had to say something, so he told her he had thought about that ball at Cornell, when he had danced with her, every day and night since. He also gave utterance to a few other idiocies—as he called them afterward when alone.

And all this time he was wondering how long he would have to stand in that awkward position, with his back to the piano.

"I recognized you only a few minutes ago," she said.

"And she bullied me for not telling her you were here," put in Leslie, with a shrug of the shoulders.

"Now, Mr. Blake, I did not tell Harry that I was saving a dance for you, but I am," laughed Claire. "He can bear witness that I do not always regard the strict conventions when I want anything. I am always scandalizing mama."

Here was an awful crisis. Oh, those trousers!

"But I am needed at the piano," stammered Frank. "You know, of course, that I am here only professionally. Were I a guest, I need hardly say that I should have begged for a dance long ago."

"Oh, you cannot escape on that plea," was her laughing rejoinder. "I have some one to play in your place. Come

on, Gladys. Sit down and carry out your promise."

She took the hand of another girl who had been behind Leslie, and whom Frank remembered as occupying his piano-stool when he first entered the room.

"Mr. Blake, this is Miss Stevens. Now, Gladys."

Frank was wedged in between the stool and the piano, so that she could not take her seat until he should get out of the way. Instead of moving, he looked appealingly at Harry Leslie.

The latter came bravely and loyally to the rescue.

"It wouldn't do, Claire," he declared. "Aunt would object to any one playing but Mr. Blake."

"Why?"

"Well—er—because—er—she likes Mr. Blake's touch. She doesn't believe any one else could play dance-music to her satisfaction."

The excuse was a lame one, and Harry Leslie knew it.

"That is positively insulting to Gladys, and I'm glad she did not hear it," replied Claire. "Why, she is a graduate of a Berlin musical conservatory, and her playing is simply superb."

"I am sure you will believe me when I say I never regretted anything so much in my life," put in Frank miserably, edging closer to the piano-stool.

"I share in your regret to the utmost," she returned, with a flash in her gray eyes that fairly stung him. "Come along, Gladys."

"Now I *have* done it, Harry," whispered Frank, as the two girls walked away. "I have behaved like a contemptible cad—a disgusting bounder. She'll never speak to me again, and all because I haven't a decent pair of black trousers. It is maddening."

Harry Leslie thought for a moment. Then he said: "I'll go and tell her that you humbly beg the pleasure of dancing the quadrille with her following the two-step, and I'll ask her to let Miss Stevens take the piano for both dances. When you see Miss Stevens on her way to the stool, you edge out of that doorway, close by, and skedaddle up-stairs."

"But—"

"No objections now. Do as I tell

you. I am going to make your peace with Claire."

"Thanks."

"Never mind thanking me, but listen. Go up two flights and wait for me in the back room. That will be out of the way of the ladies' and men's coat rooms. I'll be with you directly."

Blake acted accordingly, fortunately without meeting any one on the way. He had hardly time to look about him before Leslie was there, too.

"It's all right, Frank. Come out of that coat and put on this."

Off went Leslie's long-tailed coat; and in an instant it was on Frank, who had divested himself of his Tuxedo.

"You are to dance the quadrille with Claire," continued Leslie. "She knows all about your difficulty now."

"Knows all about it!" ejaculated Frank, horrified. "Do you mean that you have told her why I was afraid to get off the stool?"

"Good Lord! No. I merely told her that you had not brought your long coat, and therefore were not in proper uniform to dance. I explained that that was the sole reason you had been obliged to forego the rapture of dancing with her. Yes, I said 'rapture.' I laid it on thick."

"Then what did she say?"

"Oh, a lot of things! The upshot of it all was that I told her I would lend you my coat for the dance if she would get Gladys Stevens to play. Well, it all came out right; so go in and enjoy yourself. The tails of this coat will cloak all your sins. Look at yourself in that mirror and see."

Frank took a survey; and then, shaking his head, said: "There is only one danger, Harry; but it is a desperate one."

"What is it?"

"Well, you see," he explained hesitatingly, "while the coat-tails are a protection under ordinary conditions, when I whirl around in dancing the tails will fly up, and—look!"

He spun around on one foot, and up went the coat-tails.

"Yes, that shows the rags, certainly," admitted Leslie. "What shall we do?"

He mused for a few moments, and then cried joyously: "I have it. Get a needle and a thread. There's some in

that box on the dresser. You get the needle, and thread it with some of that black thread, and I'll be back in a few moments to help you."

"But what are you going to do?" asked Frank, bewildered.

"I'm going to sew your coat-tails down to your trousers, so that there will be no danger of unpleasant revelations when you dance," replied Harry Leslie triumphantly.

The friends grinned at each other. Then came a doubt.

"But—what will happen when I sit down?" said Frank. "The thread would surely tear away."

"You mustn't sit down," was his chum's reply. "You don't have to. At the end of the quadrille take a graceful leave of your partner and exit from the ballroom. Then we can exchange coats, and you will be able to take the piano again. Now, get that needle and thread ready while I go down-stairs to look after things. I am the floor-manager, you know."

"This is a dreadful situation," muttered Frank.

He felt himself growing uncomfortably warm, as he saw that there were various articles of jewelry on the dresser, together with a set of valuable gold-handled brushes, a case of razors, and other articles such as a sneak-thief might well covet.

Blake was obliged to move some of the brushes and other things on the dresser before he could get to the basket in which he was to find the needles and thread.

"Confound it! Here's a roll of bank-notes in this basket, mixed up with the thread," muttered Frank. "What makes them keep their money loose in this way? And there's a solitaire diamond ring, too. Whew! I wish Harry would come back. Suppose I should be discovered here poking about? How could I explain it?"

He found a large needle with an eye that he thought he could negotiate, and then set himself steadily to work to run a thread through it.

"Julius Cæsar! There goes the point of the needle under my thumb-nail! If it were not for the dance I am to have with her, I'd chuck the whole thing."

He dropped the thread on the floor, and could not find it. So he went for another one, which obliged him to take up the roll of bank-notes for the second time.

"Yellow-backs!" he said to himself. "By Jove! I wish they were not here. They give me a creepy feeling. I have no business to touch them. But I can't get at the thread without moving them. Ah! Here's a bit. Now, for another effort at the needle!

"Of course! First, I lost the thread. Now, I can't find the needle. There it is. It's got under that diamond ring over there."

He picked up the ring, and involuntarily allowed himself to admire the fire of the magnificent stone for an instant.

Then—he hardly knew how it happened—he found himself looking into another pair of eyes in the mirror. They were the eyes of a person standing behind him, and the person was not Harry Leslie.

For a second or two he stood there, looking into those fierce eyes in the mirror, and gradually becoming conscious that they belonged to a tall, broad-shouldered, elderly man, with a gray mustache and shaggy eyebrows to match. The man was in a fur coat which came up to his chin, and on his head was a motor-ing-cap, with a pair of goggles fastened to the front.

"Well, sir! What are you doing here?"

The newcomer had a voice in harmony with his impressive appearance, for it was deep, and doubtless could be loud when he willed it.

Frank Blake was not constitutionally timid, but he knew he was in a bad situation. For an instant he was silent. Then, in desperation, he told the simple truth:

"I was going to sew my coat-tails."

"Sew your coat-tails?" thundered Theodore Van Trompe—for it was none other than the master of the house, who hated dances, and who had come up to the third floor for the sake of the peace and quiet to be found there. "What for? What's the matter with your coat-tails?"

"Nothing particular, but I wanted to make some little repairs, and—I came up here."

"So I see. But you don't appear to be very busy at it. And, anyhow, people don't sew with diamond rings. You are a sneak-thief. That's what you are. I'll get a policeman here at once."

Theodore Van Trompe snatched at the receiver of the telephone, which happened to be close behind him. Before he could get it off the hook, Frank Blake was upon him, holding his elbow to prevent his ringing up.

"Don't do that, whatever you do?" begged the young man. "Don't call the police."

Frank's appeal suggested a new idea to Van Trompe, and, setting his teeth, he caught Blake by the shoulder. "No; you're right," he cried. "I won't call the police. I'll take you with my own hands."

Frank Blake was a trained athlete, and he had the advantage of youth; but he soon realized that he had a foeman worthy of his steel in the active old millionaire. They swayed to and fro for a few seconds, and then Frank felt a long rip in his unlucky trousers.

He had stooped suddenly, in the endeavor to save himself from going down flat upon his back, and the cloth was not strong enough to withstand the strain.

"I won't have a rag on if this lasts much longer," he reflected dismally.

"You'd better keep quiet, if you know what is good for yourself," snorted the millionaire. "I'll turn you inside out before I'll let you go, you scamp!"

"But, I assure you, I'm not a thief!" gasped Frank.

"Oh, you're not? With my diamond ring almost on your finger, and all that money right under your nose? Tell that at police headquarters when I hand you over. Detectives are proverbially credulous, and I am sure they will believe you," was the sneering rejoinder.

There was another minute or two of pulling and hauling. Theodore Van Trompe was trying to reach a revolver which he knew to be in a drawer of the dresser in this room, and with which he intended to make Frank march before him down the stairs and out of the house until he could find a policeman.

It was well for the young man that he knew all the ordinary tricks of wrestling. Otherwise he certainly would have

gone down before a skilfully applied "back-heel," which Mr. Von Trompe suddenly brought into play.

The only effect of it, as it turned out, was another great rent in the cloth that had been worn so thin by the weeks and months of organ-playing.

"By Jove! There goes the quadrille I was to have danced with her," muttered Frank as the music came floating up the stairs. "I must get out of this. I must!"

"Oh, you must?" yelled old Van Trompe, who had overheard. "Not till you have been searched. After that, I may kick you out of the house and let you go."

"Searched?" ejaculated Frank in horror.

"Yes. You didn't think I'd be fool enough to let you go without it, did you? Sewing your coat-tails, indeed!"

The hope of getting away under any circumstances buoyed the young man up, and, frightful as the ordeal seemed, he resolved to submit to a personal search rather than face other people in the house in the character of a suspected criminal. What if Claire should see him, and hear from her father that he had been caught in a private room with stolen property apparently in his possession?

"Very well, sir," he said, as the millionaire put down the pistol he had taken from the drawer. "Search me."

"I will. You don't deny, now, that you are a thief, do you?"

Frank started, and another few inches of cloth gave way. He gulped hard, and hesitated. Unless he confessed, the old man might not let him go. His only hope, otherwise, was that Harry Leslie would come up and speak for him. The old gentleman might believe his nephew. But Harry might not come, and then—

"Well, sir, are you or are you not a thief?" repeated Mr. Van Trompe. "Answer me, before I alarm the house."

Alarm the house! That would be as bad as the police. Frank tried to review all the possibilities, and then, faintly, he said: "Yes, sir. I am a—a—a— At least, it looks as if I was, I admit."

Could the Spanish Inquisition have been worse? As Frank realized that he had been forced to give himself a char-

acter at which his very soul revolted, he threw up his arms in despair and nervously shifted his feet. Another long rent was the result.

"Ah, I thought you'd confess when you found you couldn't help yourself!" chuckled his tormentor.

"I assure you I can explain, if you'll let me," pleaded Blake.

"You *have* explained. You've confessed yourself to be a thief—probably what persons of your profession term 'a second-story man,'" interrupted Mr. Van Trompe. "Turn out the inside pocket of your coat."

Mechanically, the young man dived into the coat-pocket, and—brought forth a red-leather wallet! He recognized it instantly, and a shiver ran down his spine as he saw that the article would perhaps be one more witness against him.

It was. Theodore Van Trompe pounced upon it triumphantly. As he pulled it open, a roll of bank-notes fell out. Inside the flap, in large, gold letters, was stamped the name: "Henry Leslie."

"Oho! This is my nephew's pocket-book! So you've been busy in other parts of the house! What else have you got?" demanded Mr. Van Trompe.

"Nothing. The pocket is empty," was Frank's dogged reply as he turned it inside out.

"What's in your vest?"

"Nothing."

"Let me see."

Frank pulled the vest-pockets all out, and then, before he could replace the lining, the millionaire, pistol in hand, was examining the hip-pocket, which, to his surprise, was also empty.

"I thought you had a revolver there," he said. "Now, the trousers-pockets."

There was nothing incriminating in them—a purse, containing two dollars and several pawn-tickets, a latch-key, penknife, and other trifles. Mr. Van Trompe snorted, and looked him over.

"I suppose those pawn-tickets could tell a story, and I feel that I ought to let the police know. I would if it were not for the trouble. I should have to attend court to prosecute you, and all that sort of thing. No; I'll let you go. This pocketbook I will return to its owner, of

course. I will get rid of you by way of the back-stairs and basement door. And, let me tell you, that you are lucky to get off so easily. The next time you sneak into a house to rob it, I'd advise you not to pose as one of the guests. It's a dangerous game."

The distant music of the quadrille, which he had hoped to dance with Claire, was in Frank Blake's ears, and here he was, about to be kicked down the kitchen-stairs and out of the basement-door, as a detected sneak-thief! Could he really be himself—Frank Blake? It seemed impossible.

He glanced involuntarily at the mirror. Then, with a cry of mingled shame and horror, he darted toward the door. Some one barred the way. It was not Mr. Van Trompe, but the person he had seen in the mirror.

Standing in the doorway, mystification in her eyes and a curl of angry scorn upon her lip, was Claire! Frank thought she had never looked lovelier than at that moment.

"I beg your pardon," she said stiffly. "I came to speak to papa. I heard the motor outside. I didn't know he was engaged."

"Why, Miss Van Trompe, I—I—" stammered Frank.

"That will do," interposed the millionaire. "You can't fool me that way. You know that is Miss Van Trompe, because she called me her father. I know you rascals. You are ready to take advantage of any accident, and you think you can make me believe you have a right to be in this house by claiming acquaintance with my daughter. Did this fellow contrive to get in as one of your mother's guests, Claire?"

"Well, no, papa," answered Claire hesitatingly. "But—"

"That will do. Now, my dear, don't say a word to anybody. I have made sure he has none of his booty on him, and I'm going to put him out quietly, without any fuss or publicity. There's no one on the stairs, is there?"

"But, papa, there must be some mistake."

"He's made a mistake," was her father's grim rejoinder. "That's the only one. Look at him."

With all his pockets inside out, his hair

tousled, his necktie awry, and two long strips of ragged cloth hanging below his coat-tails, the young man's appearance was not prepossessing. What Claire thought of him he could not tell from her expression, for she had turned her face away.

"But, father, don't you know who this is?" she said, after a pause.

"Yes, I know who he is—a thief."

"No. He came here to play the piano, and—"

"Oh, he did, eh? And he took advantage of that to sneak up-stairs and steal everything he could lay his hands on. That's not an uncommon game. Many rascals can play the piano. Well, some one else will have to play for him the rest of the evening. It's getting late, and this ball ought to be over soon. Come on, here!"

He put his hands on Frank Blake's shoulder, to give him a shove toward the door, when Claire interposed.

"Father, he is a gentleman. I know he is."

"He had Harry Leslie's wallet in his pocket," retorted Mr. Van Trompe doggedly. "Don't talk to me about his being a gentleman. Look at him edging against the wall. He daren't even walk boldly out of the room, as an honest man would."

Frank looked from one to the other, as he stood firmly planted against the wall. The thought of revealing to Claire his ragged condition for the moment outweighed even his humiliation at being exhibited to her as a thief.

He would be able to disprove Mr. Van Trompe's accusation in due time, but he never could explain the state of his trousers.

For a moment he caught Claire's eye. As he did so he flashed an appeal that she saw and understood.

"Father," she said, "there is some horrible misunderstanding. Let this gentleman come with me to the ballroom, and it can be cleared up, I am sure."

"You seem to believe in him, Claire," growled the old gentleman. "Well, we'll all go to the ballroom. But he's got to walk in front on the way down. I wouldn't trust him behind me."

Claire, with a smile, motioned to Frank to precede them, but he only stood

closer to the wall, as he protested brokenly: "I am deeply grateful to you for your faith in me, Miss Van Trompe, but—I would rather not go to the ball-room."

"What!" spluttered the millionaire. "You don't want to go down? No, of course you don't. You are afraid you might meet some people who know you for what you are—who might, perhaps, be the owners of some of those things you have pawned."

"Mr. Van Trompe; at least give me a chance. Don't condemn me on circumstantial evidence. Bring Mr. Leslie up here, and he will tell you that I am not a thief."

Claire gave him a quick glance, and then slipped quietly out of the room and down the stairs.

"She doesn't believe me. She's disgusted," thought the wretched young man.

"Come on, you rascal! Down the back-stairs! I've had enough of you. Get out of my house!" roared Theodore Van Trompe.

For a second Frank hesitated. Then, with a bound, he reached the top of the staircase and rushed down. Away went another half-yard of the tattered black cloth.

"Hallo, Frank! What's the matter? What is it, uncle?"

Never had Frank Blake been so glad to hear Harry Leslie's voice before. Leslie and Claire had come up the stairs together.

"I've caught a thief, Harry. Do you recognize this?"

"Certainly; it is my pocketbook," answered Leslie, taking it from his uncle's hand.

"Well, it was in that fellow's coat-pocket."

"No, Harry," put in Frank. "It was in your pocket."

"Of course it was," quietly assented Leslie.

"What do you mean by that?" howled Mr. Van Trompe. "Are you in your right senses, Harry? I don't understand you."

"Just a moment, uncle. Let me explain things."

Frank Blake was in what had come to be his favorite attitude, his back jammed

against a wall, and he thought he saw a mischievous gleam in Claire's eye, as if she suspected something. Women are not credited with sharp wits without a very good reason.

"Mr. Blake was engaged to play the piano for the ball to-night," continued Leslie. "He had met Claire at a 'prom' at Cornell about a year ago. She saw him to-night at the piano, and consented to dance with him. Not expecting to dance, he had come in a Tuxedo. I offered to lend him my coat, and we came up here to make the exchange. I had to go down-stairs to make up the sets for a quadrille, and, to tell the truth, I forgot all about him. Then you came home and found him. He was embarrassed, no doubt, and—well, that's all there is to it."

"Not a word about my real trouble with the trousers. He's a trump!" was Frank's internal comment.

"But what about sewing his coat-tails? That's what he told me he was doing," insisted Mr. Van Trompe, who found it hard to give up his positive theory that Frank Blake was a thief. "What's the explanation of that?"

"A button off. That's what he meant. He got rattled when you pounced on him. That was all," replied Leslie promptly. "He was fumbling about the dresser, trying to find one."

"What a splendid liar he is," thought Frank.

For perhaps a minute Theodore Van Trompe gazed at Harry Leslie and Frank Blake without speaking. Then, with a gruff, "Good night. I'm going to bed," he marched off and closed the door with a bang.

"Now, if you like, we shall have our dance, Mr. Blake," said Claire, smiling.

Mingled pleasure and agony showed in Frank's face, and he might have offended her again had not Leslie once more come to the rescue.

"Too bad, Claire," he interposed. "But the last dance is just finishing. Mr. Blake will have to defer treading a measure with you till the next ball. I'm sorry, old man," he continued, turning to Frank. "But it can't be helped, you know."

"Isn't it a shame, Mr. Blake?" she

said as she gave him her hand in bidding him good night.

"It is, indeed. But, as Harry suggests, it may be our fortune to dance at some future ball."

"Perhaps."

With a radiant smile and a slight pressure of her fingers that sent a thrill of happiness and hope through him, she turned and tripped down-stairs to join her mother.

"Whew, Harry!" gasped Frank. "What a narrow escape! Suppose she had insisted on my dancing? For Heaven's sake, Harry, get my overcoat at once!"

Frank Blake *did* dance with Claire at a future ball. Harry Leslie did it all.

He introduced his chum formally to Mr. Van Trompe the next day. The young man's wardrobe was whole on that occasion, and he showed to better advantage in the private office of the old gentleman down-town than he had in that third-floor back.

The interview was a success. Mr. Van Trompe took a liking to the young fellow, to whom he felt he owed some reparation, and made an appointment for another day—on business. To-day Frank Blake has a good position in the importing house of Van Trompe & Co. Moreover, he is permanently on Mrs. Van Trompe's invitation list. He plays the piano sometimes at her house, but not in the capacity of a professional performer.

MY DREAM.

WERE not dreams but visions vain,
 Could I weave in fancy chain,
 Ever fair,
 'Gainst a cloudless azure sky
 I would rear a castle high
 In the air.

Turrets ivy-bound by time;
 Walls the theme of poets' rime,
 Hallowed there.
 By yon casement I would see
 All my love, none else but thee—
 Fairest fair.

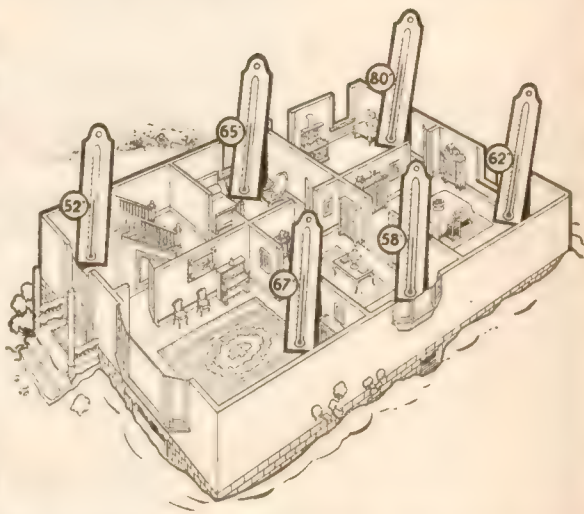
Of a sunset ever bright,
 There should dwell the golden light,
 Fading ne'er.
 Rays whose mellowed glory tints
 As it softly, softly glints
 On thy hair.

Far below, with harp in hand,
 Thou mightst see a minstrel stand
 Playing there.
 Far below—perchance in vain—
 Comes the burden of a strain,
 Half despair.

Charles Hannan.

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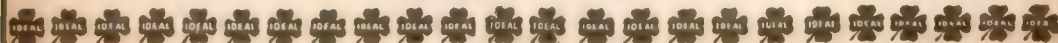
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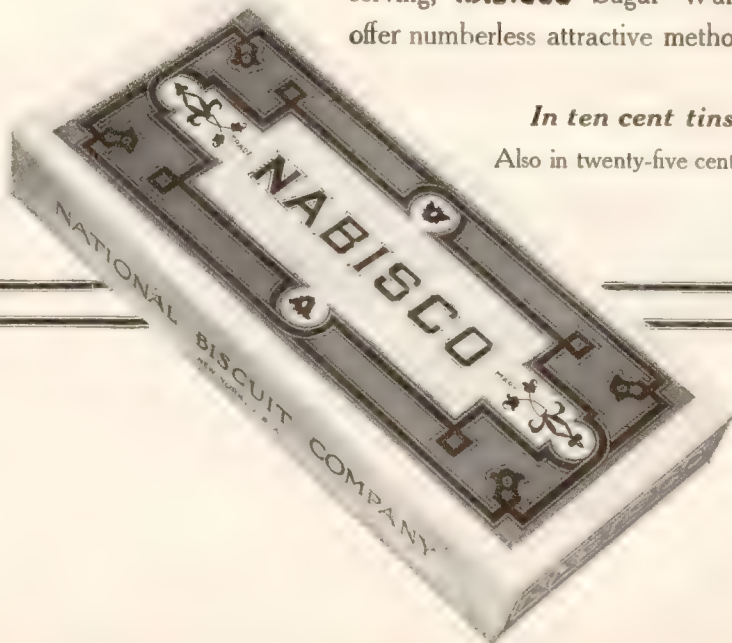
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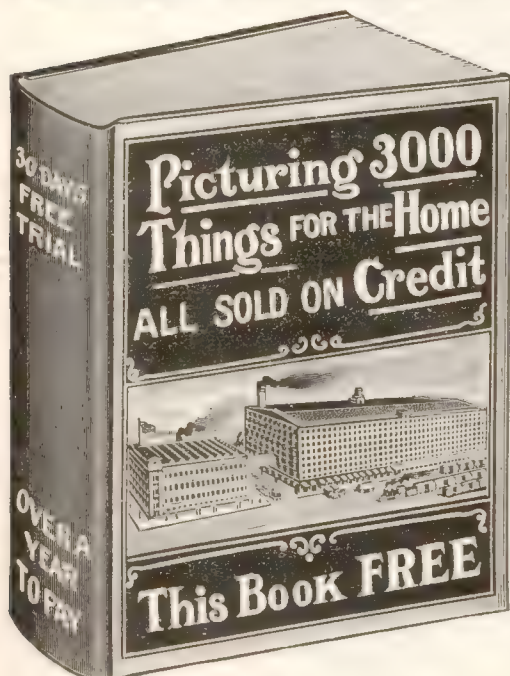
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Mounted by our student, F. Rawson, Kalamazoo, Mich.

This is the Original School of Taxidermy, and is endorsed by our thousands of students and all leading Museums, Naturalists and Taxidermists. We teach the **BEST STANDARD METHODS**, and positively guarantee success. Expert instructors in every department. Our Taxidermy work is widely known, having been awarded First Grand Prize and 9 Gold Medals at the Exposition. The Editor of any Sportsman's Magazine will tell you of the high standing of this school, which has taught Taxidermy successfully for seven years.

WE INVITE YOU TO INVESTIGATE FULLY. Send for our printed matter today. It will interest you, and it's absolutely Free. We want every sportsman or nature lover in the country to become a member of the only school in the world for sportsmen by sportsmen.

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Please send me sample Magazine catalogue etc., FREE. I am interested in Taxidermy.

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Do You Need A Gas Range?

THEN you want the one with the latest improvements—and the most of them.

While you're buying—get the best. It's the cheapest in the end.

Write now for our specifications of the new 1909 Kalamazoo Gas Range.

You know what the Kalamazoo stoves and ranges are.

You know it is the best known and most widely advertised line of stoves in the world.

You know that "Kalamazoo" stands for all that is best in stoves, down to the last detail. Or there wouldn't be over 100,000 of them in use in this country as there are now.

Now—the Kalamazoo Stove Company is putting out a brand new Kalamazoo Gas Range.

Practical housekeepers who have tested it say:

"Every known fault of the ordinary gas range has been overcome by special patented features in the Kalamazoo. It is exactly what a gas range *ought* to be—and every gas range has *failed* to be—until the Kalamazoo was perfected."

Every feature that could add to the convenience or safety of the user has been developed in the new 1909 Kalamazoo.

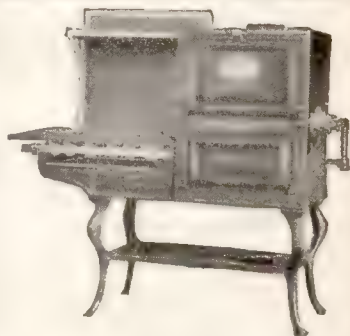
Now we'll tell you how you can see them, and prove these points for yourself.

Write for our specifications—pick out the stove you think you want. Then go to the gas company in your town and ask them to get it for you on approval.

Insist upon the best—the new 1909 Kalamazoo Gas Range. Any other will be lacking in quality—deficient in service and efficiency. For no other will give you the Kalamazoo Patented features—which a gas range actually needs to give satisfaction.

The new 1909 Kalamazoo Gas Range has been developed to its present perfection by experience—skill and judgment.

Write us now for specifications No. 847. They give necessary information as to how to buy a Gas Range. Do not buy until you get it.



Special Features

*No Other Gas Range in the
World Has Them*

Safety Burner Locks—to prevent accidental opening of the Gas Cocks.

Patent Manifold Gas Rall—to prevent leakage around the Gas Cocks.

Hot Blast Oven—heats and bakes with less gas consumption.

Heavy Cast Iron Burners—cast in one piece.

Always Cool Oven Door Handles. Oven Door Thermometer.

Oven Doors without Lining—sanitary.

Plain Castings—easy to clean. Heavier Material—inside and out.

Costs nothing for repairs.

Indestructible Cast Iron Oven Bottom.

Indestructible Cast Iron Oven Rack Guides.

Heavier Asbestos Lining than in any other Gas Range.

Occupies less floor space.

Kalamazoo Stove Company

Kalamazoo, Michigan

The Gas Company will Furnish

**"A Kalamazoo
Direct to You"**

TRADE MARK REGISTERED



"NATIONAL" Wearing Apparel

For Women, Misses and Children

Spring Style Book and Samples—FREE

The "NATIONAL" Style Book is truly called the "Complete Book of NEW YORK Fashions." To all womankind it is the most interesting Style Book published.

From the "Christy Girl Cover," reproducing a painting made for the "NATIONAL" by Mr. Howard Chandler Christy, through to the last page, your interest will increase. Every page contains a Style Message from New York to YOU—shows you in each handsome fashion plate some new Style, something of value, some aid to becomingness in dress and to economy.

Two Million Women will receive this Style Book—FREE. You can be one of them. One Copy is YOURS, but you need to act NOW—to write TO-DAY. Just say "Send me the Complete 'NATIONAL' Style Book—FREE." If you wish samples be sure and ask for them.

"NATIONAL" Tailored Suits

Made-to-Measure **\$7⁵⁰ to \$35**
New York Styles

*Spring Style Book and Samples—
FREE*

First of all, the "NATIONAL" Style Book (Sent FREE) contains Fashion Plates showing New York's Suits and Skirts for Spring and Summer. And you can have any of these Suits or Skirts Made To Your Measure in your own choice of over 400 New Materials.

And Twenty-One Years' experience in fitting and pleasing over half a million American women makes it certain that the suit we make you will fit you and please you perfectly. You take no risk—each "NATIONAL" suit is guaranteed satisfactory or your money back.

The "NATIONAL" Policy

Each "NATIONAL" Garment has the "NATIONAL GUARANTEE TAG" attached. This is our signed guarantee which says: "Your money back if you ask for it."

We prepay express charges on all "NATIONAL" Garments to every part of the United States.

"NATIONAL" Ready-Made Apparel

This complete "NATIONAL" Style Book also beautifully illustrates all the following Ready-Made Garments—all sold at "NATIONAL" Money-Saving Prices, all guaranteed and postage or express charges prepaid by us.

Millinery	Silk Dresses	Petticoats	Corsets
Waists	Lingerie Dresses	Jackets	Hosiery
Skirts	House Dresses	Rain Coats	Neckwear
Kimonos	Muslin Underwear	Plumes	Sweaters
Tub Suits	Knit Underwear	Belts	Boys' Clothing
	Misses', Girls' and Infants' Wear		

Write for the FREE "NATIONAL" Style Book.

If you wish samples, state the colors you prefer—samples are sent only when asked for.

NATIONAL CLOAK & SUIT CO., 247 West 24th Street
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Mail Orders Only

Largest Ladies' Outfitting
Establishment in the World

No Agents or Branch Stores

REVOLVERS H & R SINGLE GUNS

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YOU TO
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**A BEAUTIFUL
40 PAGE BOOK
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SEND FOR IT NOW.**

HARRINGTON & RICHARDSON ARMS COMPANY
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GET THIS \$1200.00 NEXT MONTH!

WHAT A BLESSING TO ALWAYS HAVE MONEY IN ABUNDANCE

You can, it's easy. Hundreds Getting Rich the "New Way."

Said to be world's greatest and surest money maker. One man actually made \$1281.00 IN ONE MONTH, \$51.50 IN 15 MINUTES, \$800.00 IN 8 DAYS. Not a fairy tale, fake or humbug, but absolutely true—sworn statement. New, wonderful discovery. Causing great enthusiasm. Readers, listen, see, read how this invention has made, is making thousands of dollars for others:

Does \$1200 Monthly INTEREST YOU? "My sales \$1281.00 one month, \$1118.00 another. Best thing ever sold. Not one complaint from 2000 customers." **SWORN STATEMENT BY M. G. STONEMAN, MONT.**

"SOLD \$2212.00 IN 2 WEEKS. Not one dissatisfied user," writes Korstad & Mercer, Minn. "My sales \$1680.00 IN 73 DAYS," writes C. D. Rasp, Wis. "Canvassed 60 PEOPLE—GOT 55 ORDERS. Sold \$320.00 in 16 days," writes W. H. Reese, Pa. "Enclosed order for \$115.00 FIRST DAY'S WORK. Best thing I ever worked," writes L. H. Langley, N. D. "Everybody thinks apparatus finest thing. Sold 15 one afternoon," writes Miss Eva Edwards, Nev., after ordering 73. "I averaged \$164.25 WEEKLY for three months, undoubtedly best line on market," writes J. W. Beem, Kas. "Finest seller I ever saw, catches the eye. Don't want anything better. SELL 8 OUT OF 10 HOUSES," writes Wm. Maroney, Okla. "A man that can't sell your outfit couldn't sell bread in a famine, send 48 more," writes J. B. Cashman, Minn. "I make \$100.00 DAILY," writes J. Seveigne, N. Y.

HUNDREDS MEN AND WOMEN TELL OF WONDERFUL SUCCESS equipping town and farm homes with Allen's Portable Bath Apparatus. 50,000 already sold. Acknowledged best thing ever happened for humanity. Nothing like it. Gives every home a modern bath room for only \$5.00. Think of it! Costs nothing to operate. Used wherever water in any form exists. So energizes water that 1 gallon does more than tub full old way. Gives cleansing, friction, massage, shower baths altogether or separately. Cleanses almost automatically. Makes bathing 5 minute operation. Only clean, running water touches body—no immersion. No tubs, buckets, bowls, wash-rags or sponges—no plumbing. Insures cleanliness without drudgery—prolongs life—prevents disease. Small but mighty—carried in grip. Endorsed by famous Battle Creek Sanitarium and other celebrated authorities. Most popular, easiest, quickest, surest selling household article going.

Let us give you an appointment worth \$40.00 to \$60.00 weekly

plus freedom from drudgery, long hours, wage earning, bossism, job hunting. We want more AGENTS, SALESMEN, MANAGERS, either sex, at home or traveling, all or spare time to fill orders, appoint, supply, control sub-agents. Hustlers getting rich. EXPERIENCE UNNECESSARY. Simply supply enormous demand already made—that's all. Every customer anxious to boost your business. No easier, quicker, certain way to make money. Exciting business, big profits—popular goods, guaranteed by an old reliable \$50,000.00 house—absolutely no competition—exclusive territory—co-operation and assistance.

CREDIT GIVEN. SEND NO MONEY—only your name and address on a postal card today for world's greatest agency offer, valuable booklets, credit plan, proofs of phenomenal success—ALL FREE. COSTS NOTHING TO INVESTIGATE. MEET US THAT FAR ANYHOW.

THE ALLEN MFG. CO., 1468 ALLEN BLDG., TOLEDO, OHIO



"SEE IT ENERGIZE"

See view Comb. Portable and Bathroom Unit.

THE SOCK THAT WON'T PUNCH THROUGH

It can't—the WARRANTY says so—and it's one of those gilt-edge guarantees of wear that protects every purchaser of WUNDERHOSE. Better value is

not offered you at more money—equal worth cannot be had at the WUNDERHOSE price.

There's quality—there's fit—there's a perfected method of dyeing that makes WUNDERHOSE the **best** stocking for each member of the family.

Innumerable threads of fine linen knitted into the toes, soles and heels give wondrous wear resistance to the fine, soft-feeling yarn.

Four Pairs Wunderhose for **MEN**—\$1 per box. Colors—Pearl, Grey, Tan, Black, and Black with White Feet.

Four Pairs Wunderhose for **CHILDREN**—\$1 per box. In Black or Tan. Warranted in toe—sole—heel.

Three Pairs Wunderhose for **WOMEN**—\$1 per box. In Black or Tan. Three months' wear warranted.

If any local store refuses to sell you WUNDERHOSE, send to us, stating style, color and size. Our wonderful little booklet is free. Write for it.

Chattanooga Knitting Mills

CHATTANOOGA

Tennessee

Warranted to wear

Heel

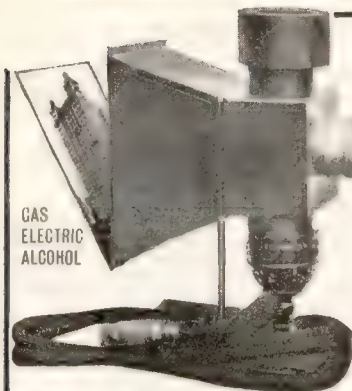
Sole

Toe

PER
BOX

Wunderhose
TRADE MARK
CHATTANOOGA KNITTING MILLS

WARRANTED TO WEAR



GAS
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ALCOHOL

6-Foot Picture-Posters at 1c Each!

THE value of the machine lies in its production of a 6-foot Picture-Poster of anything, printed or drawn. The post cards, pretty pictures, interesting photographs, attractive advertisements you are daily receiving and tucking away in a drawer for lack of a means to use them may be shown almost "Life Size" and in all the pleasing colors of the original. The Reflectoscope is the home picture machine. Just as the piano and phonograph give pleasure through the ear, so the Reflectoscope gives through the eye, and it is quite as important a part of a well-furnished home. With

THE REFLECTOSCOPE

The Post Card Magic Lantern

you may view the world from your easy chair. With only common post cards or photographs you may take your friends on a "Personally Conducted" tour of one of your interesting trips, showing them the sights you saw on your journey to make them see them as you saw them. With newspaper clippings you may review the humor or events of the day. With home-drawn sketches you may keep a party of friends in uproars of laughter; of the fun of "Scrambled Animals," "Illustrated Quotations" or one of a score of fun-making Reflectoscope games, suggested in our booklet sent with each machine (or free on request), called

"TWICE TWELVE EVENING ENTERTAINMENTS"

The price of the Reflectoscope handsomely japanned in Black and Red and fitted with gas, electric or alcohol burner—for city or country use—is \$5.00. Dealers in fine merchandise sell it, or we will send it on receipt of price. If you mention this magazine and your dealer's name we will prepay expressage anywhere in the U. S.

Alco-Gas Appliances Dept., 159-161 West 24th Street, New York City

Your Sitting Room LIGHT

IS it bright enough and well distributed enough to allow the whole family to read or work in any part of the room in comfort? Is it a vertical burner that wastes its best brilliancy on the ceiling?

The Angle Lamp throws its light down upon your book or table. It is oil lighting at its best, with the smoke, smell and bother of ordinary lamps eliminated by new methods. Yet it is fully one-half cheaper to burn than even the ordinary lamp.

THE ANGLE LAMP

resembles a handsome gas chandelier in appearance and is a perfect substitute for gas in operating and convenience. It is lighted and extinguished like gas. It may be turned up full or turned low without odor. Safely filled while burning. Requires filling but once or twice a week. Floods every corner of a room, floor and ceiling with a splendid light. It is sold on

30 DAYS' TRIAL

The Angle Lamp is made in 32 varieties from \$2.00 up, a lamp for every purpose. Send for our catalogue "26" showing just the style to suit you and explaining our trial offer.

THE ANGLE MANUFACTURING CO., - - 159-161 West 24th Street, New York



**CLEAN-UP
FOR BEAUTY'S SAKE**

Skin cleanliness is skin health and the foundation of beauty. To thoroughly clean the skin, wipe it daily with D. & R. Perfect Cold Cream on a hot wet cloth. This dissolves and brings out dust and impurities from the pores and leaves the skin hygienically clean, soft and healthy, preventing dryness, chapping and premature wrinkles.

**DAGGETT & RAMSDELL'S
Perfect Cold Cream**

quickly removes the grime of traveling, motoring and the daily occupation. Its use becomes a pleasure. Its results make it worth while. Call for it by name, speaking firmly and you will not be bothered with imitations.

Jars, 35c, up; travelers' tubes, 10c, up; at best shops.

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Daggett & Ramsdell
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NEW YORK

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Fine-Form
TRADE MARK
MATERNITY SKIRT
Registered in U.S. Pat. Office

of great interest to
Every Prospective Mother.

Something new—only scientific garment of the kind ever invented. Combines solid comfort and ease with "fine form" and elegant appearance in the home, on the street, and in society.—Always drapes evenly in front and back—no bulkiness—no draw-strings—no lacing—no ripping or basting.—Can be worn the year round.

Made in several styles, and at prices lower than you can buy the material and have them made at home.

FREE Send for our **Fine Illustrated Book—"Fine-Form Maternity Skirt"**—It's FREE to every woman writing for it. Tells all about these skirts, their advantages, styles, material, and cost. Gives opinions of physicians, dressmakers, and users. **10 Days Free Trial.** When you get our book, if your dealer has not yet been supplied with Fine-Form Maternity Skirts, make your selection of material and style, and we will make the garment to your order. When you get it, wear it ten days, and if you don't find it exactly as represented, send it back and we will cheerfully refund every cent paid. Other Skirts If not in need of a maternity skirt, remember our famous B & W dress and walking skirts will positively please you—same guarantee—Illustrated book free. Which book shall we send? Write to-day to

Beyer & Williams Co., Dept. 36, Buffalo, N. Y.

WARNING The Fine-Form Maternity Skirt is the only "Maternity Skirt" on the market—all substitutes will rise in front during development—a fault so repugnant to every woman of refined taste. No patterns can be purchased anywhere for this garment. Its special features are protected by patents.

A Living From Poultry on a City Lot

\$1,500 IN TEN MONTHS FROM SIXTY HENS ON A CORNER OF A CITY LOT



TO the average poultryman that would seem impossible, and when we tell you that we have actually done a \$1500 poultry business with 60 hens on a corner in the city garden 40 feet wide by 40 feet-long, we are simply stating facts. **It would not be possible to get such returns** by any one of the systems of poultry keeping recommended and practiced by the American people, still it is an easy matter when the new **PHILO SYSTEM** is adopted.

The Philo System Is Unlike All Other Ways of Keeping Poultry

and in many respects is just the reverse, accomplishing things in poultry work that have always been considered impossible, and getting unheard of results that are hard to believe without seeing; however, the facts remain the same and we can prove to you every word of the above statement.

The New System Covers All Branches of the Work Necessary for Success

from selecting the breeders to marketing the product. It tells how to get eggs that will hatch, how to hatch nearly every egg and how to raise nearly all the chicks hatched. It gives complete plans in detail how to make everything necessary to run the business and at less than half the cost required to handle the poultry business in any other manner. There is nothing complicated about the work, and any man or woman that can handle a saw and hammer can do the work.

Two Pound Broilers in Eight Weeks

are raised in space of less than a square foot to the broiler without any loss, and the broilers are of the very best quality, bringing here three cents per pound above the highest market price.

Our Six Months Old Pullets are Laying at the Rate of 24 Eggs Each Per Month

in a space of two square feet for each bird. No green cut bone of any description is fed, and the food used is inexpensive as compared with food others are using.

Our new book, the **Philo System of Progressive Poultry Keeping**, gives full particulars regarding these wonderful discoveries with simple, easy to understand directions that are right to the point, and 15 pages of illustrations showing all branches of the work from start to finish.

Don't Let the Chicks Die in the Shell

One of our secrets of success is to save all the chickens that are fully developed at hatching time, whether they can crack the shell or not. It is a simple trick and believed to be the secret of the Ancient Egyptians and Chinese, which enabled them to sell the chicks at 10 cents a dozen.

Chicken Feed at 15 Cents a Bushel

Our book tells how to make the best green food with but little trouble and have a good supply any day in the year, winter or summer. It is just as impossible to get a large egg yield without green food as it is to keep a cow without hay or fodder.

Our New Brooder Saves 2 Cents on Each Chicken

No lamp required. No danger of chilling, overheating or burning up the chickens as with brooders using lamps or any kind of fire. They also keep all the lice off the chickens automatically or kill any that may be on when placed in the brooder. Our book gives full plans and the right to make and use them. One can be easily made in an hour at a cost of 25 to 50 cents.

Send \$1.00 and a copy of the latest revised edition of the Philo System will be sent by return mail. The latest edition has many pages of additional reading matter, and by ordering direct you are sure to get the latest and most approved book.

E. R. PHILO, Publisher,

81 Third Street,

ELMIRA, N. Y.

A FEW TESTIMONIALS

Valley Falls, N. Y., Sept. 5, 1907.

It was my privilege to spend a week in Elmira during August, during which time I saw the practical working of the Philo System of Keeping Poultry, and was surprised at the results accomplished in a small corner of a city yard. "Seeing is believing," they say, and if I had not seen, it would have been hard to believe that such results could have followed so small an outlay of space, time and money. (Rev.) W. W. Cox.

Oct. 22, 1908.

P. S.—A year's observation, and some experience of my own, confirm me in what I wrote Sept. 5, 1907. The System has been tried so long and by so many, that there can be no doubt as to its worth and adaptability. It is especially valuable to parties having but a small place for chickens; seven feet square is plenty for a flock of seven. (Rev.) W. W. Cox.

Ransomville, N. Y., Dec. 5, 1908.

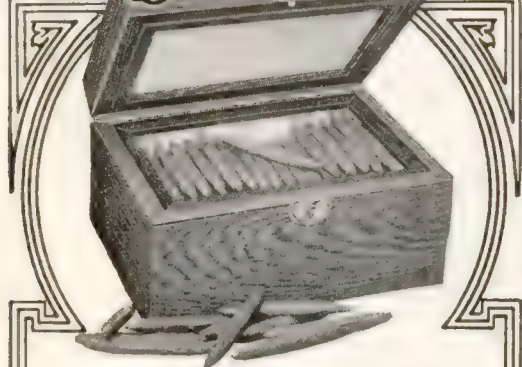
Dear Sir:—Last spring we purchased your book entitled "Philo System" and used your heatless brooders last spring and summer. The same has been a set of birds to the raising chicks in the health and mortality. The chicks being stronger and healthier than those raised on the brooders with supplied heat. We believe that this brooder is the best thing out yet for raising chicks successfully. We put 25,000 chicks through your heatless brooders this last season and expect to use it more completely this coming season. We have had some of the most noted poultrymen from all over the United States here, also a large amount of visitors who come daily to our plant, and without any exception, they pronounce our stock the finest and healthiest they had seen anywhere this year.

Respectfully yours, W. R. CURTIS & Co.

Skaneateles, N. Y., May 5, 1908.

One article of the Philo System entitled "A Trick of the Trade" has been worth three times the amount the book cost. I saved on my last hatch fifty chicks which are doing nicely. W. B. REANK.

Own your own Cigar Store



Pat. Dec. 22, 1908
Other Patents Pending

Put this Sargent Patent Cigar Chest in your house or office. Then buy cigars by the box, and

Be Your Own Dealer

50 Sargent Panetelas, regular price, \$3.50
One Sargent Patent Cigar Chest, regular price, \$5.00

\$3.50 FOR BOTH

To introduce our cigars, we will send to each new customer ordering 50 Sargent Panetelas, the above Patent Cigar Chest.

Description of Chest: Exterior of finely grained oak, "Mission Finish." Interior, glass lined. Walls 1 inch thick and heavily insulated. Piano hinge and lock. Holds 100 cigars. Size, 12x8x7 ins. Keeps cigars cool and moist.

We know the quality of our cigar is right. All we ask is a trial order. All conversation about cigars is the same, no matter what price is charged. In order to pay for the chest, we must make the cigars good enough to obtain your re-orders. You take no chances. If you find any real or fancied fault with your purchase, send back chest and remaining cigars, and we will refund your money without question.

If you want to know who we are, ask either of these banks in Bridgeport—City National Bank, Bridgeport National.

This is the proposition. Send \$3.50 to us and we will send you 50 Sargent Panetelas and the chest by express. If you order 100 cigars we will prepay express. If you prefer Mahogany chest, send \$1.00 extra; Circassian Walnut chest, \$2.00 extra. State preference for mild, medium or strong cigars.

Only one chest will be sent to each customer. Subsequent orders for cigars will be filled at \$3.50 for box of 50, or \$7.00 for 100, the regular prices.

SARGENT CIGAR COMPANY
642 Water Street Bridgeport, Conn.

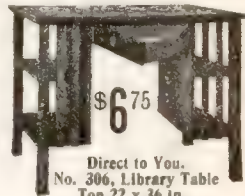
SECTIONAL "COME-PACKT" TRADE FURNITURE MARK

You CAN'T Be Fooled

"Come-packt" Sectional Furniture comes "in the white" and the finished sections are ready to put together. You see just what you get—and you get QUARTER-sawn WHITE Oak every time. No chance to disguise defects or substitute cheap woods. A few minutes only needed to fasten the sections and apply whatever stain you select—we include it free. It's a pleasure and a satisfaction to KNOW you have the best obtainable.



No. 1. \$1050
With Cushions.



Direct to You.
No. 306, Library Table
Top 22 x 36 in.

And You Save OVER HALF

We manufacture and ship direct to you at lower prices than dealers pay. Why pay middlemen's profits, store rents, clerks' wages, etc., as well as high freights and costly packing—two more items that add to the PRICE, not the VALUE of store furniture. Try our way ONCE—that's the proof. "Your money back if you say so." WRITE TODAY for free catalogue of other handsome Library and Dining-room furniture.

"It comes in SECTIONS, not in pieces."

International Mfg. Co., 334 Edwin St., Ann Arbor, Mich.



(ESTABLISHED 1879)

for Whooping Cough
Croup, Sore Throat
Coughs, Bronchitis
Colds, Diphtheria
Catarrh.

"Used while you sleep."

Vaporized Cresolene stops the paroxysms of Whooping Cough. Ever dreaded Croup cannot exist where Cresolene is used.

It acts directly on the nose and throat making breathing easy in the case of colds; soothes the sore throat and stops the cough.

Cresolene is a powerful germicide acting both as a curative and preventive in contagious diseases.

It is a boon to sufferers from Asthma.

Cresolene's best recommendation is its 30 years of successful use.

For Sale By All Druggists.

Send Postal for Descriptive Booklet.

Cresolene Antiseptic Throat Tablets for the irritated throat, of your druggist or from us, 10c. in stamps.

THE VAPO-CRESOLENE CO., 180 Fulton St., New York
Leeming-Miles Building, Montreal, Canada.

THIS SUIT TO YOUR MEASURE \$15

Boys, how do you like my suit? See the style? Your tailor would ask \$30.00 for such a suit; I'll make it to your measure for \$15.00. Let me be your tailor. I positively guarantee correct style, fit and workmanship, at \$12.50 to \$25.00—fine custom-made suits at less than ready-made prices.



TAILORED TO ORDER

I cut the cloth to measure and make it up just as you want it. You cannot order my class of tailoring through any clothing store. I am a custom-tailor, selling direct to you, therefore save you the middleman's profit. My system of home measurements is so easy that you can't make a mistake. I pay expressage.

PORTFOLIO OF SAMPLES FREE

My new portfolio contains samples of cloth in all the new weaves and designs for Spring and Summer; also fashion plate showing the latest New York modes for 1909. It is free for the asking. Send for it today. For ten years in the same location I've made clothes for thousands of satisfied customers; I'll satisfy you or refund your money.

I'm King, Tailor to the Kings of America—the well-dressed young men! Who are you? Write me.

KING TAILORING COMPANY

203 WEST WATER STREET
MILWAUKEE, WISCONSIN

— Let me teach YOU — Beauty Culture

MY FREE BOOK TELLS HOW

hundreds of women who wrote for this free book are now earning from

'15 to '35 Weekly

in a refined profession.

You can do the same.

This free book tells all about Beauty Culture and how I teach women in their own home—by mail—to become expert operators in

**MANICURING
HAIR DRESSING
MARCEL WAVING
SCALP TREATMENT
FACIAL MASSAGE
SHAMPOOING**

I also furnish valuable formulas for making Flesh Food, Massage Cream, Hair Tonics, Depilatories, Cosmetics, etc.

You can start a visiting practice—working by appointment in your patrons' homes, or you can establish a Beauty Parlor in your own home.

This profession offers unlimited opportunity for ambitious women to earn money. The demand for expert operators is growing every day. My students are able to quickly establish a lucrative practice—many of them earn money before they have graduated.



One Graduate Says:

Dear Miss King: Just received my Diploma. I am very proud of it. I will always be thankful to you. I have already earned many times the cost of my instruction. Mrs. Florence Duffy, 836 Iberville Street, New Orleans, La.

Another Says:

I want to let you know how thankful I am to be earning money through your wonderful system. The lessons are so easy anyone can understand them. I am earning \$10 a week and upwards and working only a few hours a day. Agnes Connolly, 51 W. 91st St., New York.

SEND TO-DAY FOR MY FREE BOOK

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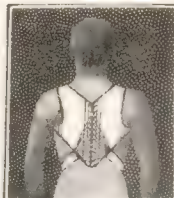
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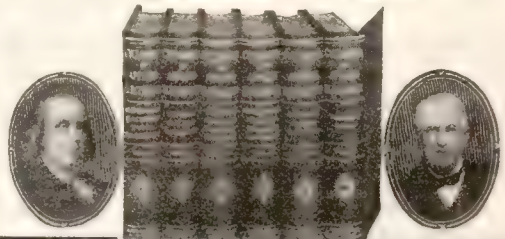
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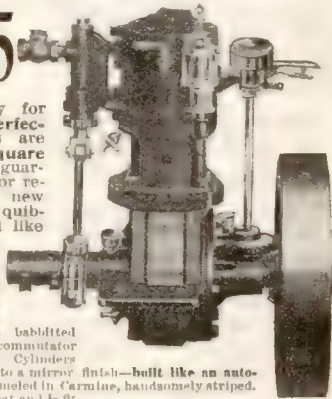
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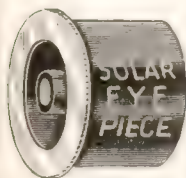
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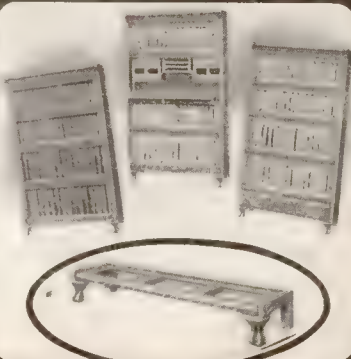
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J. C. SATTERLEE,
1816 Market St., Oakland, Cal.

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H. O. REYNOLDS,
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J. B. MCCrackAN,
Mobile Cotton Mill,
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SETH S. SWIFT,
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CHARLES HILL,
422 N. California St., Indianapolis, Ind.

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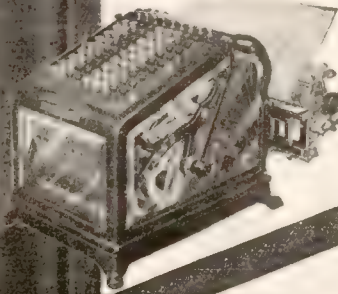
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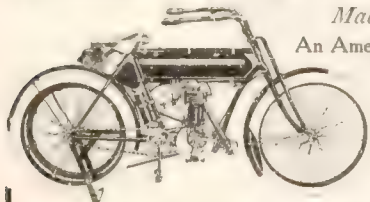
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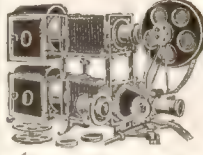
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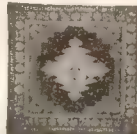
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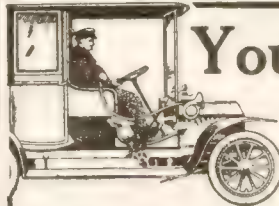
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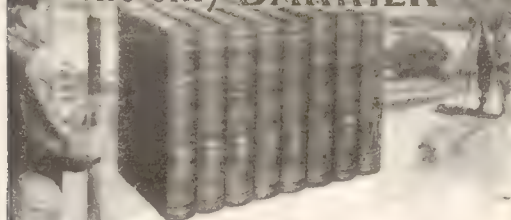
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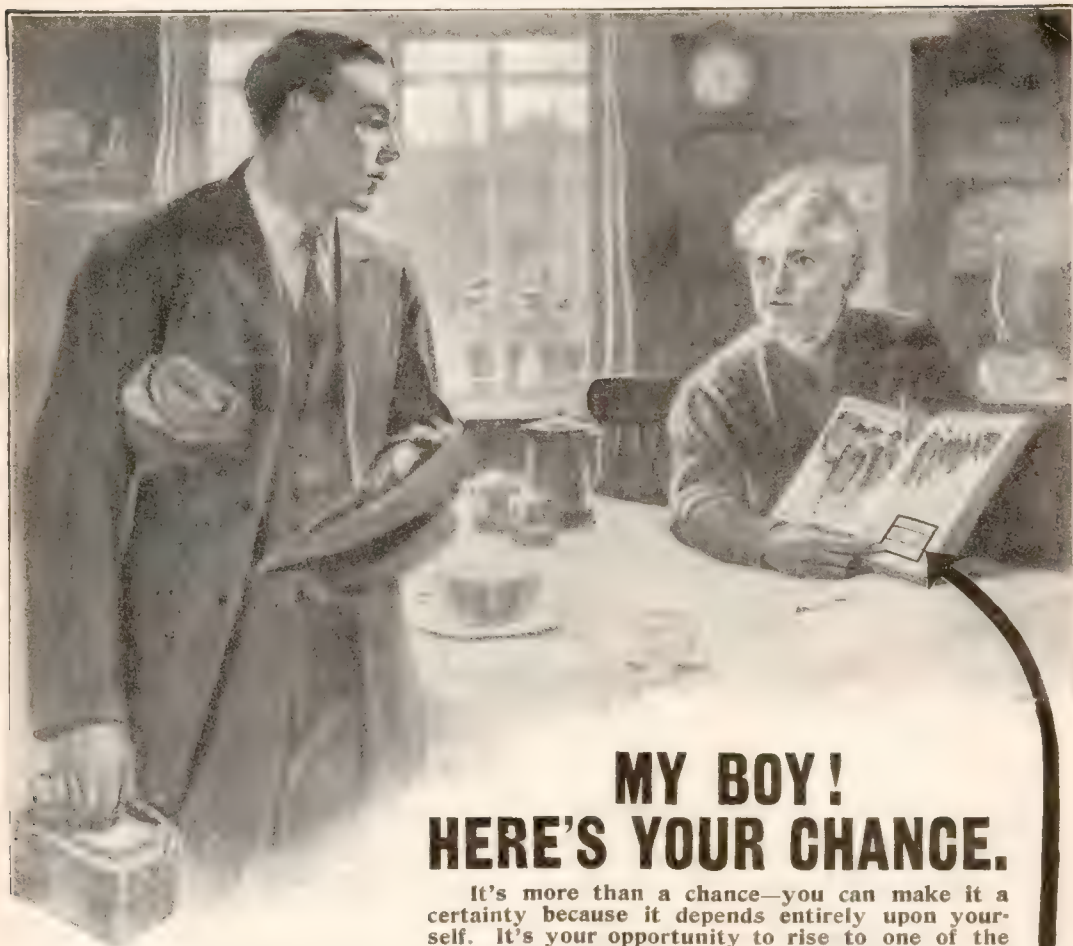
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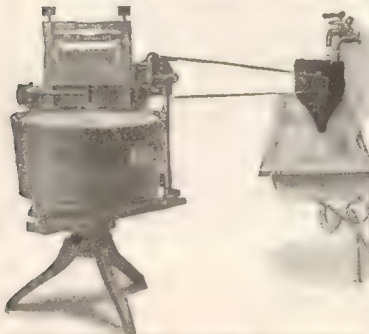
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Ever-Ready Safety Razor With 12 Blades \$

See those blades, note the wrapping. Remember that the **Ever-Ready** is the perfect safety razor blade. It's the best protected, keenest edge, smoothest shaving blade money can produce or money can buy.

There are 12 **Ever-Ready** blades in each outfit of **Ever-Ready** Safety Razors, together with **Ever-Ready** frame, handle and strop, at \$1.00. Each blade is separately tested and guaranteed.

Extra Ever-Ready Blades 10 for 50c. You can exchange 10 used blades for 10 brand new ones for 35c.

Go to any local **hardware store, druggist, cutler, department store or general store** and ask for the **Ever-Ready**. Refuse imitations and send direct to us enclosing \$1.00 and we will send the complete outfit to your home, prepaid.

AMERICAN SAFETY RAZOR CO., 320 BROADWAY, NEW YORK



Photo of \$1.00 Outfit, Opened.

Extra Ever-Ready Blades 10 for 50¢



Avoid Dyed Soaps!

Fairy Soap does not masquerade under false colors. It's an honest soap of snowy whiteness; it looks just what it is—the best piece of white, floating soap possible to make. The handy oval cake is another distinct advantage which Fairy has over all other white soaps.

Fairy Soap costs but five cents—you can pay more, but you cannot get more.

THE N. K. FAIRBANK COMPANY,
CHICAGO.



"Have You a Little 'Fairy' in Your Home?"

COLUMBIA



Columbia Double-Disc Records, 65c

Fit any Disc Machine and
Double its Value

To owners of disc machines, of every make—Columbia and others: We guarantee you a better record on each side of the Columbia Double-Disc Record than you ever bought before under any name at any price—better in surface, tone and durability. Be sure you see a Columbia dealer, hear the records played, and get a catalog.

If your dealer does not carry Columbia Double-Disc Records, we will send you a sample, postage paid, for 65 cents, and a catalog with it.



Columbia Indestructible Records, 35c

Fit any Cylinder Machine and
Last Forever

To owners of cylinder machines, of every make—Columbia and others: Columbia Indestructible Cylinder Records won't break, no matter how roughly they are used; they won't wear out, no matter how long they are played. Moreover, their tone is far purer, clearer and more brilliant than that of any other cylinder record made.

If your dealer does not carry Columbia Indestructible Cylinder Records, send us 35 cents and we will send you a sample by return mail, postage paid—with a catalog.



Columbia Disc and Cylinder Graphophones

No one thing will give so much pleasure, to so many people, for so long a time, at so little cost, as a Columbia Graphophone—\$20 to \$200. Catalog free.

Columbia Phonograph Company, Gen'l,
Dept. O, Tribune Building, New York.

BRANCHES: New York, Chicago, San Francisco,
Boston, Philadelphia, New Orleans, Wash-
ington, London.

HEADQUARTERS FOR CANADA: 40 Melinda Street,
Toronto, Ontario.

Dealers in all principal cities

Dealers Wanted—Exclusive selling rights
given where we are not properly represented.

Jobbers Wanted—Exclusive Columbia job-
bing rights open in choice territory.